

NEGOTIATING MODERNITY:  
HABERMAS AND THE INTERNATIONAL TOWNSHIP OF AUROVILLE,  
INDIA

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for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
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## ABSTRACT

The International Township of Auroville was inaugurated as an international experiment in Human Unity on the southeast coast of India in 1968. My research on Auroville constitutes a case study of collective decision-making. Coding extracts from the weekly internal newsletters of the Township 1975 to 2000 in the qualitative software program, NVivo, I reconstruct features of decision-making in the township which I argue form implicit agreements on principles of organization. Illocutionary action, the effort to reach mutual understanding, underscores each of these principles. Illocutionary action is the building block of Jurgen Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action and his Discourse Ethics. Because of the correspondence between decision-making in Auroville and the formulations of Jurgen Habermas, I apply key dimensions of Habermas' theory to developments in the township in order to identify the practical consequences of adherence to the primacy Habermas pays to illocutionary action. In this way, I submit his theory to practical test. Contrary to the theoretical expectations of Habermas, decision-making characteristic of lifeworld continues to play a role in steering the systems developed to facilitate the expansion of the Auroville Township.

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Aum Namō Bhagavate

## DEDICATION

To my mother,

Sylvia Eileen Leard

whose presence inspires me.

And to her brother, my uncle,

Lieutenant Frederick Ernest Mullins  
1921-1944

who continues to inspire even in his absence.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Rationality and solidarity are not often considered complementary. Jurgen Habermas recognized the relationship between autonomy and solidarity by examining the operations which make mutual understanding among speakers possible. To demonstrate the applicability of his propositions, he revisited social theory through the lens of communicative rationality, that is, action characterized by the effort by speakers to reach mutual understanding (illocutionary action). His concern for the potential for solidarity in modernity, his reconstructive method and the results of his reconstruction of contemporary social theory constitute the contours of the methodological and theoretical approach of the chapters which follow. This dissertation is a case study of the International Township of Auroville, Tamil Nadu, India. I apply the reconstructive methods and theory of communicative action developed by Jurgen Habermas to one feature of its development: decision-making. The purpose of this chapter is first to introduce the main methodological and theoretical components of the dissertation and then provide a brief outline of the chapters which follow.

Jurgen Habermas developed his theory of communicative action in two steps: the theory of communicative competence and the theory of societal rationalization. His purpose was to demonstrate the universality of communicative rationality by applying it to the breadth of social thought from Weber to Parsons. He laboured to identify theoretical problems such an application could resolve. The first step involved demonstrating the centrality of illocutionary action to communication. His second step

involved reconstructing social theory based on this proposition. The case study which constitutes this dissertation is undertaken in two steps: The application of dimensions of the methodical approach, or reconstructive science approach, Habermas adopted to develop his propositions. Secondly, based on the results of step one, theoretical treatment by components of Habermas' theory of societal rationalization. In this way, I approximate Habermas' two stage approach by which he developed the theory of communicative action. This dissertation then is the attempt to apply both Habermas' method and his theory to a case study of the International Township of Auroville.

Both the case and the theorist chosen to apply to it have at their roots concern for the potential of human solidarity. Auroville is named for Sri Aurobindo Ghose, a Bengali academic turned author, freedom fighter and yogic teacher active in these pursuits in India in the first half of the Twentieth Century. From 1914 to 1920 he composed most of his texts publishing them from Pondicherry in his journal "The Arya". In turn writing from a philosophical, sociological and practical point of view, he wrote from his own experience and research of the potential in the practice of yoga to harness the capacities necessary to achieve the related pursuits of individual freedom and human unity. He wrote of the reawakening of the great civilizations of Asia and in particular, the potential that would be harnessed by integrating the dynamic material emphasis of Western Civilization with the modes of concentration cherished and sustained by Indian Civilization. Auroville was commenced in 1968 to work out the practical basis for human unity. Although endorsed by UNESCO, sponsored by the Government of India, and legally registered as a project of the Sri Aurobindo Society in Pondicherry, those who arrived to join the experiment from 1967 were told that the direction and organization of

the township was to be determined by those that chose to live and work there. The concern of this dissertation is not the written works of Sri Aurobindo but the practical functioning of decision-making in the township the mandate of which is Human Unity.

Habermas situates his theoretical efforts in the context of one of the originating concerns of the modern discipline of sociology: the problem of modernity. First identified by Hegel in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, modernity is an era characterized by the loss of traditional norms and sources of authority and the rise of individual autonomy and rights. The problem of modernity questions whether there can be a basis for solidarity in such a context. Following two tracks (1) what he identifies in the German tradition as a transcendental approach, or more widely known as logical deduction, and (2) scholarship on the subject, Habermas sought to identify what must necessarily be present for mutual understanding between speakers to take place. One resulting concept, that of formal pragmatics, identifies the posing and defending of validity claims as the mechanics which underscore the effort to reach mutual understanding. His theory of communicative competence argues that solidarity inheres in language use itself (Rehg 1994, 171). The effort to reach mutual understanding is the process through which both the subject and rationality emerge. Ignoring this primary role of communication for subject formation and for individual and group learning has specific consequences, which he identifies in his theory of societal rationalization. The solidarity provided through communication is the basis for his critique of modern society and is his primary concern.

Habermas did not expound on reconstructive science. Rather, he referred to his own approach as such. One of the principle elements of his methodical approach is first to develop an internal relationship between data and thoughts about the data. I adopted a

grounded theory approach (originally elaborated by Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to apply three stages of coding to a computerized database of the weekly internal newsletters of the township of Auroville 1975 – 2000. I had co-designed and supervised the uploading of the selections from the Notes / News while working for the Auroville Economic Research Programme in India. In preparation for the analysis as one component of my Ph.D programme in Canada, I uploaded the database into the qualitative software program, NVivo. The coding system I applied to the database matches one of the techniques of applying a grounded theory approach to qualitative software analysis described by Lewins and Silver (2007).

A methodical approach necessitated a stage of free coding in which I generated hundreds of codes based purely on the content of the database. As I moved through the years of representative material, a successive stage involved collapsing the free codes into 31 axial codes which best represented the database content. The higher level of abstraction allowed me to identify relationships between codes. The recognition of themes in the database constitutes the third level of analysis. I argue that the seven themes recognized through close examination of the database from December 1975 to September 1993 constitute principles of organization that participants in the experimental township would recognize if made explicit to them. This process parallels Habermas' approach to theory construction in which he attempted to make the concrete operations of reaching mutual understanding explicit. Rather than adopting a realist epistemology by which he would have postulated the operations which give rise to and explain everyday reality, he searched for the operations that are practiced in day-to-day communication

which are implicit but not necessarily explicitly recognized. Hence Habermas expresses and defends a pragmatist epistemology.

I completed the coding of the database by incorporating selective coding into the axial coding of the database September 1993 to July 1994. Selective coding is the third step of a grounded theory approach to a qualitative database described by Lewins and Silver: selection of the material to be used as representative material in the finished report. In my case, I wanted to test if the themes that I recognized in the database over time could also be recognized in short data chunks. This stage therefore served two purposes. Having completed and tested the thematic analysis stage of the project by the July 1994 date in the database, I used the “text search query” function of NVivo to search for needed information from that date to the end of the database in December 2000.

This dissertation attempts to apply the methodical approach Habermas applied to dyadic communication to a case study of social organization. The seven themes recognized by means of the free and axial coding stages of the database analysis characterize implicit principles of organization in Auroville. The recognition that mutual understanding underscores each of the seven themes determined how I applied a theoretical analysis. Since Aurovilians have chosen for their principles of organization the operations which Habermas identifies as central to the remaking of solidarity in modernity, the experimental township becomes a testing ground for his theory. On the one hand, I’ve attempted to apply his reconstructive methodology to analyze the development of the township: the identification of operations which constitute principles of organization for the township. On the other hand, the database analysis provides reason to argue that organization in Auroville is indicative of communicative action, a

practical example of Habermas' theory. The application of elements of his theory that follows provides evidence that Habermas' communicative action and discourse ethics are sustainable in practice, and secondly, indicates the organizational form that communicative action can take on a civic level, that is, the network of decision-making developed in Auroville. Therefore the dissertation responds in a very modest way to the question: What are the practical consequences of adherence to the communicative rationality Habermas establishes as central to his theory of modernity?

Arato and Cohen (1988) provide the dynamic understanding of Habermas' dual conception of society, lifeworld and system, which I apply in the theoretical analysis. They follow the tradition of critical theory by applying Habermasian theory with a clear view to explicit outcomes purposeful in their direction of improving social organization in general. By applying the brief scheme by Arato and Cohen, evidence is provided that Auroville's particular adoption of communicative action intensified their ability to respond to attempts to truncate it. Contrary to the theoretical expectations of Habermas, decision-making characteristic of lifeworld continues to play a role in steering the systems developed to facilitate the expansion of the Auroville Township.

## **1.1 Dissertation Organization**

There are three principle components to this dissertation that in concert aim to achieve the dual purpose of (1) contributing to the development of Auroville as international experiment in Human Unity, and (2) contributing to the methodological and theoretical tradition of Sociology. The three components are the International Township of Auroville itself, the methodology designed to set up an analysis of it, and the theory

applied to the analysis to focus it and generalize the results into a scheme accessible to those with common research interests. The core chapters of the dissertation address each of these components.

Chapter Two provides a brief background to Auroville's historical development. Most of the chapter is oriented to providing the township's development up to the point where data analysis commenced with the first publication of the Auroville Notes in December 1975. In order to alert the reader to Auroville's capacity for growth and elaboration of activity and industry despite its historic challenges, this chapter also includes the general configuration of population, settlement expansion, and increase of formal activities and industry to the year 2000, the endpoint of the organized database.

Chapter Three provides the general theoretical context of this study in the advent of modernity, the ideal of self-referential progress where problems are identified as opportunities, compared to selected post modernist authorship which, as exemplified, indulges knowledge dislocated from an aspiration to make such knowledge a contribution to the welfare and progress of all. Habermas is viewed in relief in the context of this opposition as a social philosopher whose efforts give ground to believe the problem of modernity may be addressed. This chapter includes an outline of the features of Habermas' theory of communicative action relevant to the study. I then specify dimensions of Arato and Cohen's summarization of the usefulness of Habermas' lifeworld-system duality to a reconceptualization of civil society. This summary and the opportunities for social change it presents to them constitute the framing of the theoretical analysis in Chapter Six. The International Township of Auroville can be considered an intentional community. I draw on one author of positivist orientation and



one author of post-modernist orientation who assert the relevance of intentional communities in addressing the problem of modernity. A feminist author provides her experience of the adoption of consensus for decision-making that corresponds to the experience of it in Auroville. Three post modernist authors conceptualise community appropriate to its meaning in Auroville.

The methodology chapter (Four) describes the elements of Habermas' reconstructive science that I adopted for the purpose of analyzing the database. Three sections follow: (1) situating the current research in the context of a larger program of research on Auroville starting with what culminated as my Masters Thesis; (2) an examination of the epistemology adopted to undertake the analysis which includes further specification of reconstructive science; (3) a step by step description of the procedures developed to set up the database analysis.

Chapter Five Database Analysis describes the results of the pre theoretical approach to the database, that is, the results of the two analytic stages of free coding and axial coding complemented by the seven themes which emerged as a third level of analysis. The content of Chapter Six Theoretical Analysis follows from the observations in Chapter Five that dimensions of Habermas' theory of communicative action and discourse ethics apply in practice among the residents of Auroville. I review the connection between those dimensions of Habermas' thought and the seven themes. One sequence of events which demonstrates the Aurovilian response to hierarchical control of decision-making in the township is analyzed by framing the events with Arato and Cohen's treatment of Habermas' dual conception of society: lifeworld – system. A

concluding summary followed by a brief discussion of the limitations of the study and contributions of the dissertation findings to sociological theory comprise Chapter Seven.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **BACKGROUND TO AUROVILLE'S DEVELOPMENT**

Conceived as a specific geographic area in which participants have the mandate to experiment with social, economic and political forms in order to achieve human progress by means of human unity, Auroville is the world's only international township. Its conception began with the work of the famous Indian revolutionary Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950). It was carried to fruition in 1968 by the work of the French national, Mirra Alfassa (1878-1973), and continues to be worked out by the current 2300 residents. I commence this background to Auroville with some of the key developments in the life and ideas of Aurobindo Ghose.

At the age of 5, Aurobindo and his brothers were sent by their father, a doctor in Calcutta, then the capital of the British Raj, to be educated in England. Aurobindo's talent was such that he earned a full scholarship to Cambridge by means of which he could support himself and his brothers. Earning his degree in classical languages, he returned to India to take up a lectureship with the Maharajah of Baroda at his college on the west coast of India. He quickly became principal of college. From the time of his undergraduate education in Cambridge, he increasingly took concern for the independence of India. When in India, he combined this concern with a new found interest and capacity for different forms of yoga. In 1905, he relocated to his native Calcutta and started India's first nationalist newspaper, calling his country men and women to join together to eliminate the British presence. This was a period of great foment in Bengal (in the east of India) following the British attempt to partition it, then

their failure to respond to the widespread famine in the region. From different teachers, he had learned and mastered different forms of yoga, considering these practices the means to empower him to work towards the emancipation of India.

Traditional Indian science or the pursuit of knowledge often appears to have a different starting point than that found in western tradition. In India, the gaining of knowledge through yoga is premised on the sublimation of desire, an active discipline to loosen the hold of one's social conditioning in order to experience life increasingly directly, an increasing awareness and self-mastery of different dimensions of experience, physical, physiological, emotional, and mental. Traditionally, the disciplined opening up of perception / awareness on one of these levels is the basis for recounting observations and recognizing relationships, the basis for the Indian sciences of nutrition and medicine for example. As Aurobindo's involvement in the independence movement intensified so did his mastery of different traditions of yoga. He was ultimately arrested by the British authorities and placed in solitary confinement for one year. Upon release, he immediately began publishing again his incendiary journal. By now he was also examining India's earliest texts, the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas and the Gita. Activating the same skill that earned him a degree in Cambridge in Classical Languages, he commenced work to offer the Indian public his own translations of the earliest original texts because he considered the current translations to have missed or misunderstood their central ideas. Michael Hill (1973) refers to this type of endeavor as "revolution by tradition", a reinterpretation of the foundations of a culture or religion in order to renew it.

Aurobindo heard in advance of an impending second charge against him along with the intention to expel him to the prison colony located on the Andaman Islands. He

escaped Bengal to the French port of Pondicherry in the south of India, one of four ports retained by the French after losing the south of India to combined British and Indian forces in the 1700's. Despite repeated demands to release Aurobindo to British custody, the French of Pondicherry were only too happy to keep him. From Pondicherry, Aurobindo, now called Sri Aurobindo as a symbol of respect for his role in the independence movement, serialized his writings and reinterpretations of India's ancient texts in his journal called the Arya. He was convinced that Indian independence was now inevitable. His concern now was the revitalization of Indian civilization. He wrote of the reawakening of the great civilizations of Asia. In particular, he wrote of the importance of the mutual benefit of combining Western and Indian ways of living and thinking. He considered the current understanding of Indian yoga as the means to extinguish an individual's cycle of rebirth to be a misunderstanding, a great loss to India's cultural legacy. He sought to combine yoga with the Western telos of social progress, an orientation drawn from his own experience of harnessing yoga as a practice to enable him to be part of independence movement. Traditional yoga is partitioned into hatha, perfection of the body, karma, the practice of good works, jnana, the pursuit of knowledge, raja, energy, and many others. He combined what he considered their essential ingredients into the pursuit of surpassing individual habits of behaviour not for personal release from the confines of life but into participating in what he experienced within himself as a conscious push for advancing the evolution of the human species. Hence Sri Aurobindo's efforts shifted from the emancipation of India in particular to the fulfillment of the evolutionary potential of humanity as a whole. We may note the combination of Indian yoga and the Western theory of evolution but it is also worth

noting that the concept of evolution is found in Indian tradition in the progressive incarnations of Vishnu.

The legacy of Sri Aurobindo's life can be found in practical ways to this day in Auroville. Firstly, volunteers may appear as if they are working in a bakery, a computer repair service or developing alternative energy systems for village environs. Primarily these residents are, or may be, practicing yoga in which the work is the physical field of their practice. In other words, the work is not taken up as a means of survival but as participation in conscientiously overcoming the boundaries they increasingly perceive of their individual existence. Their effort is to identify and work to overcome their weaknesses, the irrepressible emotions and physical ailments which are the legacy of their lives to that point. The push is to be able to act effectively, conscientiously, grabbing that thread of decisiveness in which one is acting on one's own clear vision of the best possible action for themselves and the collective. The aspiration is for change / growth which is a benefit to all. The yoga is the basis of the intensity in their work, at one and the same time an individual struggle within for freedom from their limitations and to earn the capacity to contribute to concrete physical and social improvements without. Secondly, Sri Aurobindo noted that individual success in yoga can easily be lost in the sea of humanity, neither recognized nor appreciated. Hence his integral yoga is taken up in Auroville in a social context where the success of one may positively influence the progress of others. Thirdly, there is no expectation that what works for one will work for others. Diversity is assumed; conformity is not a positively valued attribute. Fourthly, Sri Aurobindo engaged in this work as a labour, not as a religion. It is for people to whom it makes sense. Hence a religion or a world-wide movement was not seen by him as

advancing the work, but more likely to sidetrack it. Given the intensity of the individual work and social participation without the formalized community of a church or sect, or even collective meditations, to provide a channeling of experience into formalized methods of crisis resolution, individual relations and collective meetings in Auroville are cathartic and unpredictable. Daily interpersonal relations are a challenge to keep a hold on one's direction in the midst of constant challenges from others. Sincerity is the byword of the community in which the work involves giving to others exactly what one is, and through which participants find increasing responsibility with regard to their community and collective work heaved upon them. The Mother (see below) coined the term, divine anarchy, to represent the organization of those who acted on the perception of deepest need for the group as a whole, without the need for government. This kind of organization was her hope for Auroville. Fifthly, Sri Aurobindo experienced evolution as a conscious movement. In Auroville, there is constant dissatisfaction with the current state of progress; regular renewal of the aspiration, and planning for something better. Sixthly, in his text in which he reconstructs the central tenets of different forms of Indian yoga, "The Synthesis of Yoga" (1976), Sri Aurobindo clarifies for the reader that the schemes and representations he creates for the purpose of expressing his ideas are heuristic, not to be taken as real. His method is to provoke experience rather than to superimpose his own experience on others. He made the classical Indian distinction between form and substance. Likewise in Auroville, one recognizes wariness of social, political and economic formulae, an appreciation for getting to the heart of issues, no matter how messy.

No one is obligated to follow a set of rules or doctrine beyond the laws of India through their participation in Auroville. There are fundamentals such as no private property to which residents adhere in different ways. As we shall see later on, volunteerism is the rule in Auroville, yet the factors above are demonstrated without being uniformly adopted. This suggests that several of the key ideas of Sri Aurobindo have appeal for a substantial proportion of those that choose to join.

After having met Sri Aurobindo in 1914, a French national, Mirra Alfassa, joined him in 1921. Because of his revolutionary activities and his authorship since, devotees had been and were continuing to arrive in Pondicherry to learn from him directly. Mirra took up the work of setting up an ashram for him. India is dotted with ashrams that are set up as institutions of learning. With significant interest on a part of the public in the presence or teaching of a person considered exceptional, an ashram is set up by and for those interested. Joining an ashram typically involves taking up the discipline revealed by the person centred in this way. Services are also developed for those who choose to visit but who retain their normal routines. In the case of Sri Aurobindo, much of the French quarter of Pondicherry today forms part of the ashram, an international school, the dining room, book store, Samadhi, residences, guest houses, sporting facilities, as well as many other services. Secondly, this quarter accommodates many of the businesses and residences of those that chose Pondicherry to live in order to participate in the ashram life without actually joining it.

The Sri Aurobindo Ashram grew to be one of largest ashrams in India. Mirra Alfassa became a central figure, named by Sri Aurobindo as “The Mother”, signifying to him that she embodied the force of conscious evolution. It is not unusual in India for this



title to be assumed by a woman when she is the central figure in a charismatic movement. The significance he gave to the title was unique to him. His work had become their work. Following the death of Sri Aurobindo in 1950, Mirra Alfassa was not satisfied with the ashram. Sri Aurobindo had by virtue of seeking a mutually strengthening synthesis of Western and Indian thought and practice expected dynamism on the physical and social levels. Ever deepening concentration through yoga is for Sri Aurobindo the mechanism for concrete individual and social change, transformation. In the 1960's, the Mother considered again an earlier dalliance with the idea of a township with Sri Aurobindo at its centre. With regards to their common work, she shared with Sri Aurobindo wariness that neither religion nor a social movement was consistent with their purpose. Despite this, she instituted the Sri Aurobindo Society in order to make available the thought and practices of Sri Aurobindo to people in other parts of India. With her renewed interest in a project that would bring the thought and practice of Sri Aurobindo to life in a dynamic living way, she conferred the responsibility for the fundraising and organization of an international township to the Sri Aurobindo Society.

Key to understanding the development of Auroville from its conception in 1965 is the prominent position of Sri Aurobindo in the recent history of India's successful independence movement; secondly, reverence in segments of the Indian populace for him as author and yogic teacher, and thirdly; reverence for the Mother as charismatic leader of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. She had become a spiritual leader in her own right, very significant in India, drawing to Pondicherry people from all over the world. In the Indian context, the project of Auroville had very large figures standing for it. In the three years that led up to the inauguration of Auroville, the Central Government of India chose to

sponsor it and UNESCO endorsed the project three times from 1967 to 1970. Fund raising and land purchase commenced. A prominent architect from Paris, Roger Anger, volunteered to design the layout of the city. Early settlers arrived and, at the request of the Mother, several members of the ashram settled on Auroville land.

In the 1960's, an area of land to the north of the Union Territory of Pondicherry in the state of Tamil Nadu was designated by the Central Government as one of India's most backward areas. On a denuded plateau just off the Bay of Bengal, a significant part of this area was chosen for the location of Auroville. The Mother argued that for Auroville to live up to its mandate to find living solutions to global problems to locate it in the midst of severe environmental and social problems was appropriate, an opportunity. Locating it in a developed country would leave much undone. Local landholders who sold their land were promised that the township would generate employment.

On February 28<sup>th</sup> 1968 a boy and a girl from each member country of UNESCO deposited soil from their home country into the urn situated in a wide amphitheatre prepared for the occasion of the inauguration of Auroville. Where specific delegates did not arrive, Indian children fulfilled their roles and carried soil in the Olympian pageant meant to symbolize the purpose of Auroville, the achievement of Human Unity. Broadcast from her residence in Pondicherry, the Mother composed and read out the four point Charter of Auroville, which has served since then as its constitution:

## The Charter of Auroville

1. Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville, one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.
2. Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.
3. Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.
4. Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity.

In the Auroville context no other written text is cited more or placed more central to the aspirations of its residents. The first line is of particular significance in the township from its earliest development. Auroville is held in trust for humanity as a whole. Aurovilians cannot claim Auroville as their own. Instead, they participate in Auroville's range of economic, political and ecological experiments as a way to redress circumstances faced by people all over the world. In an Indian sense, it is an offering to the world. In this way the Auroville form of collective "organization" is distinct from the

collective “ownership” typical of cooperatives and communes. This commitment was central to residents breaking ties with the Sri Aurobindo Society from 1975 and the moral impetus to face the increasing government management from 1991. But the principle that Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole has also been used within Auroville with interest to attempt to sanction one party grabbing the assets of another party. Adherence to this one line of the Charter has provoked the formulation of policies on the secure claim of use of property without legal ownership. This arena of discourse forms part of the collective discourse.

The Charter emphasizes the Mother’s intention that Auroville is for learning, research, experimentation, boundaries of expectation are cast wide open. The implication drawn by Aurovilians is that the freedom to experiment on developing a township and all its forms of organization is fundamental to its *raison d’etre*. This comprehension complements the first line of the Charter and together holds part of what Aurovilians believe the experiment offers that is precious to the world. The Charter clearly states Human Unity as the purpose of the experimental township. In the Auroville context, three of Sri Aurobindo’s works are considered sociological: *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, and *War and Self-Determination* (1970). While Sri Aurobindo himself could no longer be at the centre of the township that the Mother originally conceived for him in the 1930’s, one of his principal values and purposes of his work is. For him, human unity is the groundwork for great advances. But for both him and the Mother, the living basis for that unity had yet to be found. The Mother conceived of Auroville as the place where it could be worked out. This is the challenge she presents to those who choose to volunteer to live and work in Auroville.

The fundraising on the part of the Sri Aurobindo Society was successful. With some of these resources they organized industries with local employees to generate ongoing surplus for the development of the city, such as AuroFood located far outside the planned city area. Other industries such as Toujours Mieux metal workshop, the Handmade Paper Factory and Auropolyester were set up adjacent to the experimental urban community of Aspiration. These industries were made viable through the labour and organization of Auroville residents and local skilled and unskilled labour. From very early on, local individuals and families were choosing to join Auroville.

There were three strands to early development: Firstly, industries and activities financed through the Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS) as noted above. The community of Aspiration for example was financed by the SAS but was built and organized by those who would live there. Aspiration was a concentration of thatched residences with a community kitchen that was to be a staging ground for the development of Auromodele. The latter is the urban project which was envisioned as the experimental ground, architecturally and socially, as preparation outside the planned city limits for the development of the residential zone in the city itself. The population of Aspiration grew from 25 in 1969 to 125 in 1974, people of 12 countries, five continents living in close proximity (Savitra 1974, 20) immediately adjacent to the 1500 people of the Tamil village of Kuilapalayam (Savitra 1974, 63). Secondly, the enthusiasm and fraternity generated among executive members of the SAS and their deputies responsible for administering the many projects undertaken to get the township off the ground (Internal SAS correspondence drawn from the storage vaults of the current Foundation offices). Thirdly, individuals and families moving onto the far flung pieces of land purchased for

the experiment on which they developed homesteads, dug wells, planted trees, developed the parched land to grow food, and in several instances, developed cottage industries employing local Tamil villagers. Communities started in this way include Forecomers, commenced by an American couple, Bob and Deborah; Utilite, commenced by a Mexican man, Mali; Centre, commenced by a Canadian woman, Janet, and several Americans; Kottakarai, by a group of 12 mainly Dutch and American volunteers; Fertile, commenced by an American man, Dennis; Auroson's Home, commenced by a German-Swedish couple, Frederick and Shyama, and their children; and, Pitchandikulam, commenced by an Australian man, Joss (Savitra 1974, 8-30). By 1974, twelve communities were developing from these and several other early pioneering efforts.

Drawn from Auroville the First Six Years: 1968 to 1974, Figure 2.1 provides a visualization of the layout of Auroville in 1974. The town plan is based on concentric circles. The innermost circle is the city area divided into four quadrants: residential, cultural, industrial and international. At its centre is the Matrimandir, a recently completed structure with a quiet inner space intended for residents to sit by themselves when needed to refresh, renew themselves and their resolve. The greenbelt constitutes the area between the first and second concentric circles with arms of park reaching into the city area. Outside the second circle is intended for larger scale farms, experimental communities and potentially a port along the coast. Table 2.1 provides a breakdown by community of ethnic participation. Table 2.2 provides a breakdown by community of age and sex.

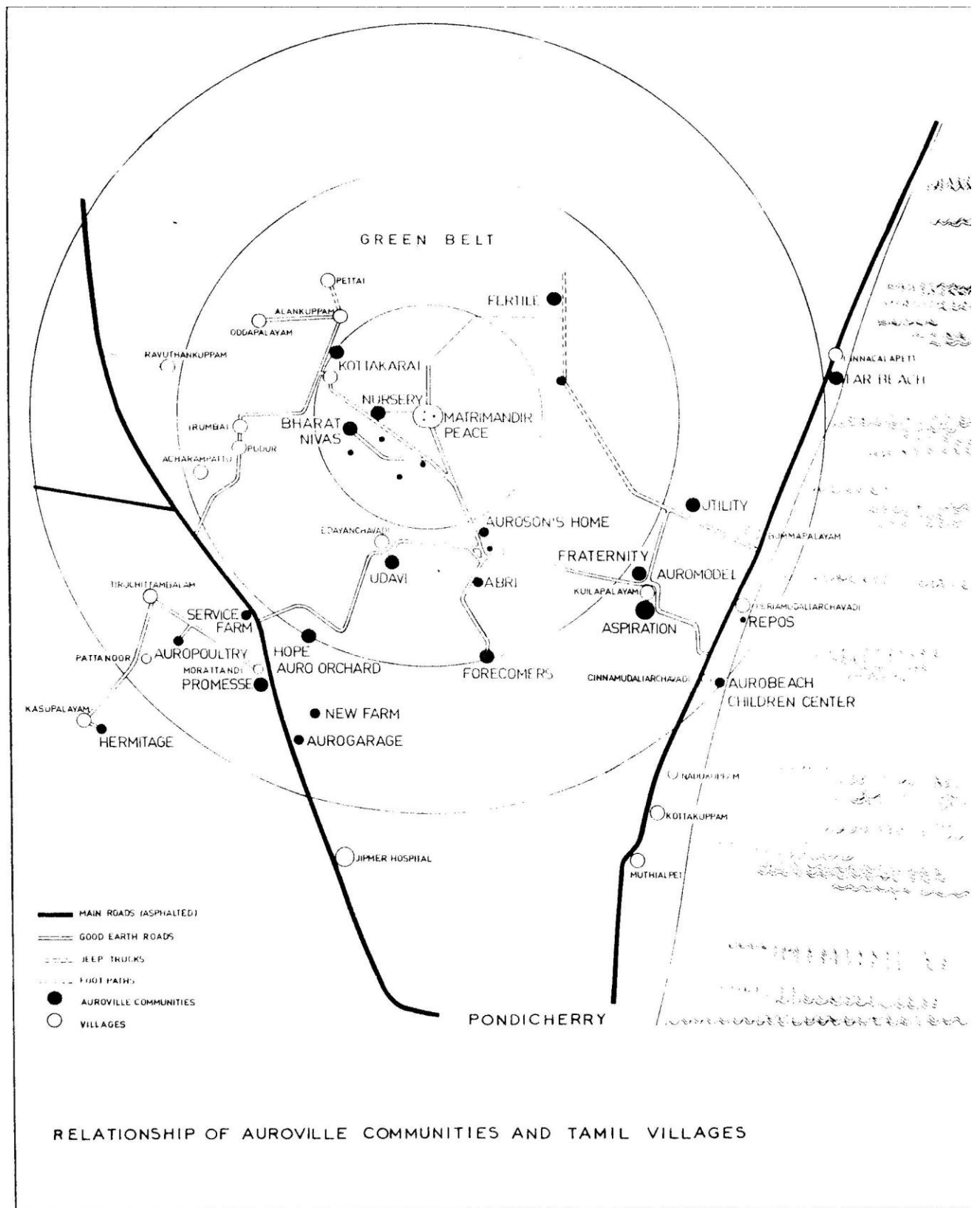


Figure 2.1. Map of Auroville 1974 (Savitra 1974).

Table 2.1. Population by Community and Nationality April 1974 (Savitra 1974)

TABLE 1: NATIONALITY-POPULATION RATIO ( as of April 1974 )

| Community            | Auroville<br>-born | Indian | French | USA | UK | German | Dutch | Italian | Swiss | Australian | Canadian | Swedish | Belgian | African | Mexican | Tunisian | New Zealand | Malaysian | TOTAL |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------|--------|-----|----|--------|-------|---------|-------|------------|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------|-------------|-----------|-------|
| *Aspiration          | 9                  | 56     | 26     | 13  | 7  | 8      | 2     | 1       | 2     | 3          | -        | 2       | 2       | -       | -       | 1        | -           | -         | 132   |
| *Centre              | 1                  | 4      | 6      | 20  | 5  | 4      | 5     | -       | -     | 1          | 2        | -       | -       | -       | -       | -        | -           | -         | 47    |
| *Promesse            | 7                  | 10     | 6      | 2   | -  | 3      | -     | -       | 1     | 1          | -        | -       | -       | -       | -       | -        | -           | -         | 30    |
| *Auroson's Home      | 5                  | 2      | -      | 3   | -  | 7      | -     | 3       | -     | -          | -        | 1       | -       | 3       | -       | -        | -           | -         | 24    |
| Kottakarai           | 4                  | 6      | -      | 3   | 1  | 3      | 4     | 1       | -     | -          | -        | -       | 1       | -       | -       | -        | -           | -         | 23    |
| Fertile/<br>2Banyans | 2                  | -      | 5      | 4   | -  | 2      | -     | 1       | -     | 3          | -        | -       | -       | -       | -       | -        | -           | -         | 17    |
| Far Beach            | 3                  | -      | 3      | 3   | -  | 2      | -     | -       | -     | -          | -        | -       | -       | -       | -       | -        | -           | 1         | 12    |
| Fraternity           | -                  | 2      | -      | 2   | -  | 3      | -     | -       | 2     | 1          | -        | -       | -       | -       | -       | -        | -           | -         | 11    |
| Forecomers           | 1                  | -      | -      | 7   | -  | -      | -     | -       | -     | -          | -        | -       | -       | -       | -       | -        | -           | -         | 8     |
| Discipline           | -                  | -      | -      | 1   | -  | 5      | -     | -       | -     | -          | 1        | -       | -       | -       | -       | -        | -           | -         | 7     |
| Hope                 | -                  | -      | -      | -   | -  | 4      | -     | -       | -     | -          | -        | -       | -       | -       | -       | -        | 1           | -         | 5     |
| Udavi                | -                  | 1      | 1      | -   | 1  | -      | -     | -       | -     | -          | -        | -       | -       | -       | -       | -        | -           | -         | 3     |
| Utilite              | -                  | -      | -      | 1   | -  | -      | -     | -       | -     | -          | -        | -       | -       | -       | -       | 1        | -           | -         | 2     |
| Pitchandiculam       | -                  | -      | -      | -   | -  | -      | -     | -       | -     | 1          | -        | -       | -       | -       | -       | -        | -           | -         | 1     |
| ▲TOTAL:              | 32                 | 81     | 47     | 59  | 14 | 41     | 11    | 6       | 5     | 10         | 3        | 3       | 3       | 3       | 1       | 1        | 1           | 1         | 322   |

\*communities including environs.

▲ figures only represent present population in Auroville as of April 1974. Statistics unavailable for associate Aurovillians living in Pondicherry and villagers who have joined Auroville but presently reside in their villages.



Table 2.2. Population by Community, Age and Sex 1974 (Savitra 1974)

TABLE 2: AGE-SEX RATIO (as of April 1974)

| Community             | 0-4 | 5-10 | 11-19 | 20-25 | 26-30 | 31-40 | 41-50 | 51-60 | 61+ | Male | Female |
|-----------------------|-----|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|------|--------|
| *Aspiration           | 11  | 15   | 24    | 18    | 30    | 25    | 8     | 1     | 0   | 69   | 63     |
| *Centre               | 3   | 1    | 2     | 17    | 12    | 7     | 2     | 1     | 2   | 29   | 18     |
| *Promesse             | 7   | 3    | 2     | 1     | 5     | 7     | 3     | 2     | 0   | 17   | 13     |
| *Auroson's Home       | 5   | 3    | 4     | 0     | 3     | 8     | 1     | 0     | 0   | 14   | 10     |
| Kottakarai            | 4   | 0    | 2     | 8     | 6     | 3     | 0     | 0     | 0   | 13   | 10     |
| Fertile/<br>2 Banyans | 2   | 1    | 4     | 8     | 2     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0   | 9    | 8      |
| Far Beach             | 3   | 1    | 0     | 1     | 3     | 3     | 1     | 0     | 0   | 6    | 6      |
| Fraternity            | 0   | 0    | 2     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 0     | 0     | 0   | 7    | 4      |
| Forecomers            | 1   | 0    | 0     | 2     | 1     | 4     | 0     | 0     | 0   | 5    | 3      |
| Discipline            | 0   | 1    | 0     | 3     | 3     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0   | 4    | 3      |
| Hope                  | 0   | 1    | 0     | 1     | 1     | 1     | 1     | 0     | 0   | 2    | 3      |
| Udavi                 | 0   | 0    | 0     | 1     | 1     | 1     | 0     | 0     | 0   | 3    | -      |
| Utilite               | 0   | 0    | 0     | 0     | 1     | 1     | 0     | 0     | 0   | 2    | -      |
| Pitchandiculam        | 0   | 0    | 0     | 0     | 1     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0   | 1    | -      |
| ▲TOTAL:               | 36  | 26   | 40    | 62    | 72    | 64    | 16    | 4     | 2   | 181  | 141    |

\*communities including environs.

▲ figures only represent present population in Auroville as of April, 1974. Statistics unavailable for associate Aurovillians living in Pondicherry and villagers who have joined Auroville but presently reside in their villages.

The SAS organized grants and donations for the development of Auroville in a General Fund from which expenses for Auroville were drawn (Savitra 1974, 90-91). NGO's were also involved from very early on providing funding related to village development, such as water supply and the development of cottage industries. Although Aurovilians received no wages or salaries, the system of "prosperity" provided on a monthly basis basic living needs and pocket money (Savitra 1974, 90-91). Auroville was meant to be a self-sustaining township. "Prosperity" was meant to help get development in the township off the ground (Savitra 1974, 91). The General Fund was a resource for building with architectural style and aesthetic value formal structures like Last School in Aspiration and model residences in Auromodele. Concurrently the pioneering communities were developing their own simple structures from locally available resources based on the immediate need of survival and the motivation to pour energy into regenerating the land.

While barren land spreading out over 30 square kilometers was being populated by people committed to its regeneration, government and other funding was being used to establish industries and civic buildings. In the centre was the Mother, meeting in Pondicherry with individual residents and a weekly group of different residents from the community of Aspiration, insisting that those assembled in Auroville would have to find the way forward. In late summer of 1973, the General Fund could no longer adequately support Auroville activities (Savitra 1974, 91). According to Savitra,

The first and only general Auroville meeting was held at the beginning of September in the unfinished amphitheatre surrounding the urn to seek some resolve to the financial crisis. It was decided that the individual communities and units would try to sustain themselves either by recourse to personal funds or by contracting work for outside concerns. Though it was not possible for Auroville to

go from almost total dependence to complete independence, this began the push. (1974, 91-92)

It was financial crisis that first brought Aurovilians together in a decision-making forum. As a means to sustain themselves, they organized the Central Food Distribution in the Centre area to replace the individual practice of communities and work groups organizing their own food supplies (Savitra 1974, 92). Available funds were pooled into a Central Fund for food purchase from the bazaar in Pondicherry and from the producing farms of Auroville. The principle was to assess the food needs, buy in bulk and distribute equally regardless of capability of contributing (Savitra 1974, 92). The number of kitchen gardens grew rapidly (Savitra 1974, 92). Silent Sunday morning meetings of 12, each person present representing a community of Auroville, also commenced in August 1973 (Savitra 1974, 94-95).

In November 1973, the Mother passed away (Savitra 1980, 108). Aurovilians were organizing themselves across the plateau to face the ongoing financial crisis. They had in five and a half years established a rudimentary form of subsistence. A population centre was established in Aspiration along with early attempts at education. Industries in Aspiration and Abri were meeting some of the township's building and engineering requirements. Orchards, farms and dairies were already contributing to a collective food base. Greenbelt communities had planted thousands of seedlings in order to regenerate the land (Savitra 1980, 49). Employing local villagers, the community of Fraternity had developed cottage industries including weaving, embroidery, crochet, floor mat production, cane furniture, carpentry and woodworking (Savitra 1980, 26-27).

Aurocreation, an embroidery and crocheting production unit started by Lisa, a Dutch woman working with local village women, could by 1973 help to set up other production

units (Savitra 1980, 23). Jocelyn organized a boutique and an export unit in Pondicherry to help market products made in Auroville (Savitra 1980, 63).

Pour Tous (For All) is a community institution which has continued to the present day. It was commenced in February 1974 as a food distribution centre and free store for the eastern side of Auroville (Savitra 1980, 92). Savitra describes its commencement as follows:

On February 28<sup>th</sup> of 1974, Pour Tous (For All), years in preparation, materialized. For long Aurovilians had wished to eliminate the internal exchange of money, but a workable alternative had not yet emerged, because most of the producing units – agricultural or industrial – required a returning capital to continue, and most had not begun to reach the point of sustaining themselves through outside markets. Pour Tous represented a first focus to undo the habit of internal money flow, although informal interchange of goods had grown organically between individuals and communities and Auroville labor has always been free. (1980, 92)

While Auroville was building an internal network, the absence of the Mother provoked changes in the relationship between Auroville and the channel for its funding, the SAS. By 1975, the leadership of the SAS was asserting ownership and control of Auroville. The response in increasingly large segments of the Auroville population was to cut off all ties with the SAS, leaving Auroville without a legal status and without its funding channel. It is at this point of departure for the collective organization of Auroville that the concern of this dissertation begins, along with the resource for the analysis of Auroville, the commencement of the Auroville Notes – News, December 1975. Our database of the selected content of the weekly Auroville Notes-News spans the years 1975 to the year 2000.

Membership in the township by the year 2000 had grown from the 322 of 1974 to over 1500 volunteers, roughly one third from India and the rest from over 30 countries. French and German nationals comprised the two largest foreign ethnic groups. A quarter

of Auroville's residents had migrated from neighboring villages; the occupational background of residents from other regions of India and the world ranged in experience from unskilled to professions in medicine, law and academics. By the year 2000, the Auroville population had developed 105 settlements on Auroville land interspersed with the lands of five Indian villages. Development since then is in accordance with a town master plan agreed by the residents and approved by the government of India in 2001. Auroville land and village land together constitute an area of over thirty square kilometers. The village population in the immediate area was approximately 15,000. Also by the year 2000, residents of Auroville had developed and were operating over 150 industrial, commercial, educational, service, research, health, village development, environmental and agricultural units. These units were hiring people from the surrounding areas and other parts of India, totaling almost 2,800 in number by that same year. By this time, there were four official languages: English, French, Tamil and Sanskrit; Auroville-wide meetings continued to be normally conducted in English. Since 1991, Auroville has been operating as an autonomous body of the Human Resource Development Ministry of the Central Government of India.

The disciplines of social science grew out of the rapid industrialization and capitalization of western civilization but remain centered on the three elementary concerns of any human group, namely, speech, power and exchange. These three native concerns to any human life were elaborated in quickly changing circumstances into the fields of sociology, political studies and economics, respectively, with a high degree of overlap. Their concern has always been to understand the relationships and systems at work and find ways to respond to their disadvantageous outcomes.

While these disciplines are today highly elaborate in terms of both theory and methodology, this is appropriate to the sophistication of the societies under study. Auroville was specifically and explicitly conceived and commenced to approach the same areas of concern but with a difference in approach. Auroville as an institution is asked to resolve the issues of modern social science from a practical approach. Auroville then has to be a project of sufficient expanse to find working solutions to the distortions of modern organization. Auroville was established to evoke speech which generates harmony not war, power without inequality, exchange without poverty, all the major concerns of the modern world embedded therein. It was initiated to take up these elementary social scientific concerns from the ground up, on little used land, in which the solutions would arise as living relations which then could be emulated in other areas of the world, because they work, not because they make sense/cents.

Auroville then grows forests from the desert, grows food free of chemical poisons, markets the products internally so that the practices remain concerned with fresh air and nutrition rather than survival in a competitive market which presses for abuse of the land, air and water. The polity strives for consensus; the economy involves voluntary partial leveling with regard to the personal distribution of resources for collective use. The township intends to move towards an economy where work, fulfillment and survival remain linked, but money and status are not primary motivating factors for social actors. Yoga remains the explicit purpose of work in Auroville, for the collective benefit, “for all”.

The significant analytical point of the development of Auroville in this period from 1975 to the year 2000 is that despite substantial growth in population, economic

activities and resources, Auroville continued to maintain lifeworld principles of face to face decision-making. In the next chapter, I will draw theoretical components from relevant positivist, modernist, postmodernist and feminist sociologists and social philosophers appropriate to identifying and framing the significance of Auroville's unique pattern of political subsystem formation.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The dissertation employs Jurgen Habermas's theory of societal rationalization as a framework to analyze the development of the International Township of Auroville (1975 – 2000). Such an analysis engages the distinctive role of communicative rationality with respect to the "problem of modernity." The latter refers to reduced social cohesion and integration associated with the loss of traditional norms and sources of authority, on the one hand, and the rise of individual autonomy and rights, on the other. While this concern was central to Sociology as it grew as a discipline in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, Habermas in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century specified his concern to what makes mutual understanding between speakers possible. This concern forms the basis of his theory of communicative competence which, combined with his theory of societal rationalization, constitutes his theory of communicative action. Following Immanuel Kant and Max Weber, Habermas approaches the question with rationality as the unifying focus of his argument. In contrast to scholars such as Noam Chomsky who from an individualist and cognitivist perspective examined the knowledge an individual would need to use language effectively, Habermas's approach was sociological. In the Theory of Communicative Action (1984, 1987), he developed a set of concepts which identify the social norms through which mutual understanding is achieved. He laboured to develop a framework which both legitimates itself and facilitates further analysis of the dynamics and dilemmas of modern life. By virtue of placing mutual understanding central to his project, the orientation of his reconstructive theory development shifted from an



interpretation of social organization based on assumptions that consciousness is a characteristic of the individual, that is, subject-centered, to a field of analysis Martin Buber (1966) called the “between”: the intersubjective. From the standpoint of his new epistemological ground, he reinterprets the body of literature from Weber through Horkheimer and Adorno, Mead to Parsons, to mention only the main theorists from which he draws to construct his theory of communicative action to address the “problem of modernity”.

Analysis of Auroville serves as an empirical grounding of the debate concerning the “problem of modernity.” In the next section, I locate this debate in the origins of “post modernity.” I identify and outline the perspectives of two advocates of the postmodern conception, Jean Baudrillard and Francois Lyotard, and the leading advocate for a renewed modernity, Jurgen Habermas. Discussion of these three contemporary social analysts locates the theoretical framing of an analysis of Auroville in Habermas’ identification of consensus as universal, ideal and pragmatic means to achieve the enlightenment goals of truth, beauty, freedom, harmony and justice. These are means and goals common to Habermas and the International Township of Auroville. Auroville’s general experience attests to Nietzsche’s “will to power” as referenced below, yet its historical development demonstrates that participants in the experimental township do not yield the value placed in, and constantly renewed efforts toward, consensus. In the sections which follow, I specify the aspects of Habermas’ theoretical work used to frame a theoretical analysis of Auroville in Chapter Six. I commence this task by examining one critique of Habermas from a left realist perspective (Sitton 2003). By so doing, I identify Habermas’ distinctiveness with respect to the realist approach that he left behind.

Secondly, I examine dimensions of Habermas used by Cohen and Arato (1988) and Cohen (1995) for the construction of a theory of civil society. This use of Habermas emphasizes the potential for lifeworld to be a source of social change in both lifeworld and system. Thirdly, I examine a range of theorists who from differing epistemologies, positivist, modernist, postmodernist and feminist, legitimate the application of an intentional community such as Auroville to the general societal concern, the “problem of modernity.”

### **3.1 An Origin of Postmodernism**

Many authors in the twentieth century turned their attention to the consequences generated by the opening up of status relations and the critique of ideology associated with modernity: Nietzsche, Foucault, Baudrillard, and Derrida, to name only a few. The analyses they offer contribute to the earliest and ongoing form of modernism, that is, the critique of accepted orders of knowledge and social organization. This was the dynamic of the Enlightenment. Some followers of modernism, such as Jean-Francois Lyotard want to partition their inherited mode of critique to a new era of social life and critique that they call the postmodern.

The Enlightenment spanned the century from the English Revolution to the French Revolution, roughly the 18<sup>th</sup> Century (Zeitlin 2001, 1). It was a period in which all forms of thought and organization came under the scrutiny of the newly liberated powers of reason. Up to this period, reason was largely circumscribed by the contours of religious doctrine and feudal social organization. Discoveries in the fields of astronomy and physics, the widespread dissemination of information in local languages via the printing

press and the break in papal authority brought the reign of theological authority to its end. The Enlightenment was an optimistic period during which proponents of reason considered human agency to be that which would liberate people individually and collectively from need and doubt. Proponents of the Enlightenment associated it with principles of Truth, Beauty, Freedom, Harmony and Justice. A generalized emancipation of the human spirit was expected from reason unleashed from ignorance and domination.

Hegel identified the modern period in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Associated with the Enlightenment, modernity was defined as the period in which the application of reason would be the basis of social organization. He was the first to identify the problem of modernity with the stabilization of subjectivity in a highly differentiated world without the normative and ideological foundations of tradition. He located this problem as central to the future of a modern world (Braaten 1991, 116-117).

The first wave of capitalist production was coextensive with the Enlightenment and cannot be disassociated from it. Individual rights and autonomy developed with private property and the labor market. Those that could put themselves in a situation of ownership were the greatest beneficiaries of the labour power “freed” from feudal obligations and collective access to land. In this way, the Enlightenment had early critics. The problem of modernity was recognized as the reduction of social cohesion and integration associated with the loss of traditional norms and sources of authority. The issue with which theorists have struggled for the last two hundred years is: what is the agent of social cohesion in a society that has left traditional norms and authority behind? What may be identified as the unifying principle? According to Habermas, the advent of the modern age was associated with subjective freedom. Civil law secured the freedom to

pursue individual interest. The state assured in principle equal rights with regard to political will-formation. With modernity, private life was not necessarily or unquestioningly an adjunct to communal systems of belief and practice but was characterized by autonomy. The private sphere was associated with the potential for self-realization. Related to these attributes of the private sphere, the public sphere was a reflective process, rather than a transmission of imparted wisdom (1987b, 83).

While Kant and Hegel identified reason as an empirical and ideal source of unity, much later in the century, Karl Marx advanced the notion of “species being” (Sayer 1989, 134, 183-185). Marx associated the possibility of our best possible behavior, human potential, with the realization of ideal living conditions. He recognized the dual aspect of being human: we are individual and yet our efforts are only meaningful with respect to contributing to the whole of nature (Swingewood 1975, 92). He recognized that far from being emancipating, the modern relations of capitalist production exploited people’s time and energy, threatened their physical health, and alienated them from their powers of production and natural well-being and creativity. Much of the value created through labour was appropriated by the owners of industry and capital creating two separate classes whose interests were antithetical to each other. The alienating potential of capitalism is that a person must work for him/herself (Swingewood 1975, 92). Our “species being” is realized through our activity with others.

Two principle factors led to further critique of Enlightenment values by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: The consequences of the French Revolution, a long unresolved experiment in rule by the people, and the living conditions of the working class of Europe. Nietzsche is often identified as the author who augured the postmodern age. He

recognized the pathology of knowledge disconnected from need. The misreading of reason had interiorized culture creating a chaotic inner world and barbarous external behavior (Nietzsche 1990, 104-105). Like Marx, but with completely different emphases, he critiqued the extent to which modernity was drawing people away from their potential.

Nietzsche rejected reason as either a central or unifying principle of human life. He sought an 'other' of reason and located it in myth because he could not find in modernity a resource for itself (Braaten 1991, 121-122). "We moderns, in point of fact, possess nothing which is truly ours" (Nietzsche 1990, 105). His goal was liberation from the enclosures of the modern world, a will to power. He located his principle in the Greek figure of Dionysus, conceptualized as "the pre-individuated self capable of ecstasy" (Braaten 1991, 122).

Nietzsche emphasized the individual capability for power and joy, the subjugation of the individual in the modern world, and the power of myth to break one free of domination. According to Braaten, these ideas became the resource for a critique of modernity in the twentieth century (1991, 122). Dionysus represents both the will to power and the individual power to generate meaning. In like fashion, two directions of critique flow from Nietzsche's work: the critique of power in modern society and a critique of metaphysics (Braaten 1991, 122). Braaten identifies Bataille, Foucault and Lyotard in the former stream of thought; Heidegger, Derrida and Baudrillard in the latter. I will examine an exponent of each of these two streams in the next section, followed by a summary of the work of Jurgen Habermas.

### **3.2 Twentieth Century Critiques of Modernity: Baudrillard, Lyotard and Habermas**

Jean Baudrillard takes up the aesthetic critic by invoking the metaphor of the mirror (1975, 20). In the capitalist system, as represented by him, we lived a type of simulation where use and exchange value ruled. But the image masked the absence of reality: the image was man as producer linked to man as moral being (Denzin 1986, 196).

Baudrillard identifies Marxist critique as having fallen into the same world as the object of its critique where ideology cannot be discerned because signs no longer make reference to a basic reality. In other words, Marx was guilty of generating the ideology that men are alienated because they sold their labor power (Baudrillard 1975, 31).

Baudrillard locates the postmodern age as a further step in this process. Individual awareness is now mediated by products of the communication industry. The image is no longer masking the absence of reality, “there is no longer a basic reality to which objects and their signs refer” (Denzin 1986, 196). Now the symbolic imbues both the commodity and exchange (Baudrillard 1981, 147-148). It is at this stage that he is obliquely referring to traditional status relations, a fundamental element of the pre-modern. The logic of status and prestige govern exchange (Denzin 1986, 197).

Communicative understanding in the postmodern era is for Baudrillard “structured by the collapse of the division between the public and private in everyday life” (Denzin 1986, 197). Our personal lives are receptive to the media while at the same time exploited by it. There is no longer a straight forward way to connect the real, the rational and the symbolic. “Intersubjectively shared meanings, grounded in rationality and reason, have slipped away as a dominant motif of the postmodern period” (Denzin 1986, 198). The metaphysical no longer exists. Like the pre-modern period, we are reflections of the

system. This is according to Baudrillard. For the postmodern era, Baudrillard shifts his metaphor from the mirror to screens and networks and makes the television set the epitomic cultural object (Baudrillard 1983, 127).

Consistent with a positivist approach, Baudrillard seeks to discover general patterns in a world external to himself. Inconsistent with positivism, he applies metaphors instead of rigorous testing of his hypotheses. Consistent with the pre-modern world, his approach confers on himself the status of expert (*pundit*) of current affairs. I will address later how Habermas cannot be considered either positivistic or pre-modern in his approach. I will suggest that he is involved in the labour prescribed by modernity. In other words, he is off screen.

The observations shared by postmodernists prove useful because the sophistication of their language use (again a feature of the pre-modern) functions conscientiously to open to the public, distortions in discourse and scientific discourse in particular. Lyotard takes up Nietzsche's stream of thought concerned with the critique of power.

Lyotard identifies two branches of discourse: the scientific and the narrative. The scientific is denotative except when it needs to legitimate itself. Then it resorts to the narrative form for legitimation (1984, 29). Stromberg identifies two forms of language use, the referential and the constitutive (1993, 6-14). Referential language assumes correspondence to actual objects, people or places. Constitutive language provides the context, all the messages in actual communication, including metaphor and canonical language, which constitute the intersubjective generation of meaning. Canonical language relates to understandings that are considered constant and which become references in communication, abstract notions of nature, the cosmos, and life in general. When Lyotard

refers to narrative he is referring to the referential and the constitutive as they combine in actual communication. Because the scientific has had to rely on legitimating stories, the Enlightenment, the role of reason, for its legitimation, Lyotard questions how science can at the same time devalue narrative as fable, myth, etc. He equates the story telling of modern science with other stories. In other words, the canonical language of modernity is no more convincing than any other canonical language. Therefore Lyotard rejects the meta-narratives that have legitimated science from its beginnings. Furthermore, Lyotard identifies the language game of denotation as being distinct from the language game of prescription:

...the difference between a denotative statement with cognitive value and a prescriptive statement with practical value is one of relevance, therefore of competence. There is nothing to prove that if a statement describing a real situation is true, it follows that a prescriptive statement based upon it (the effect of which will necessarily be a modification of that reality) will be just. (Lyotard 1984, 40)

The legitimation concern is a major thrust of postmodernism. Hegel postulated the unifying spirit of reason as the legitimating agent of the modern world. Marx appealed to the emancipation of humanity in the dialectic of reason embedded in human praxis, that is, contradictions in human behavior and organization seek resolution in human practice. Lyotard, like Nietzsche, rejects both reason as spirit, and reason in practice, as emancipatory or unifying. According to Lyotard, these canons are fiction. Indeed even science cannot legitimate itself. It is a language game among many other language games (Lyotard 1984, 40). With regard to discourses in the postmodern era that Lyotard proposes, "legitimation can only spring from their own linguistic practice and communication interaction" (Lyotard 1984, 41). Another feature of the postmodern era follows from this proposition. If discipline in science no longer carries the burden of



deciding what valid information is, or prescribing appropriate standards of truth, members of the public are empowered to choose which discourse from a plurality of language games will be applied where.

In a manner complementary to Baudrillard, Lyotard outlines the nature of the language game of science as it is secured in capitalism: Wealth, efficiency and truth converge where scientific discovery becomes increasingly contingent on expensive technological developments. Truth becomes co-opted by the rich (Lyotard 1984, 45).

Capitalism flourished on profit enhanced by the harnessing of technology in the production process. To the advantage of those concerned with production, surplus resources flowed into the development of ever new technology.

It is at this precise moment that science becomes a force of production, in other words, a moment in the circulation of capital. It was more the desire for wealth than the desire for knowledge that initially forced upon technology the imperative of performance improvement and product realization. The 'organic' connection between technology and profit preceded its union with science. (Lyotard 1984, 45)

The Enlightenment ideal of truth is subverted for concern with performativity. The utility of scientific discovery generates profits that can generate more discoveries. The agenda is set not by what is true or just, but what can generate yet more profit (Lyotard 1984, 46). The emphasis on performativity encroaches upon other areas of social life beyond production and science. Lyotard suggests that with respect to judicial outcomes the "performativity of procedures" outweighs the normative foundation of laws (1984, 46).

Lyotard argues that modernity has subverted itself; postmodernists are those that want to make its subversion readily apparent. Yet his argument weakens when he conflates efficiency and power. They are related but not the same. He posits, like

Baudrillard, that reality is plastic and may be re-formed by those with power. Through their structural determinations of the modern consciousness, Baudrillard and Lyotard follow central themes of the Frankfurt School, epitomized by Herbert Marcuse in One Dimensional Man (1964). Unlike exponents of the critical school, with which both Marcuse and Habermas identify themselves, Baudrillard and Lyotard imply that one must adapt to this new era of existence as if their observations were conclusive. This is beyond a claim of objectivity, which the realism of the proponents of the critical school would also claim. It is claiming the discovery of general laws that govern social life without sufficient consideration for human agency as constant and universal. This is an orientation somewhat characteristic of a positivist approach to the analysis of social life. It is the reason that positivism fell out of vogue in the field of sociology as the twentieth century wore on.

It is possible that the public, as individuals and as collectives, are not so empty of powers to discriminate, i.e. powers to reason. Habermas takes a moral and activist stand and hence distinguishes himself from the positivist tendency of Baudrillard and Lyotard. Instead of positing, as they do, that there is an inscrutable external nature of a particular type to which we must be ready to respond, he locates the building block of his concerns in speech acts in which we all participate every time we enter a concrete communicative situation. If the world is distorted and alien, what are the causes? What are we doing? In other words, commensurate with Enlightenment values, Habermas endeavors to demonstrate that we are the ones that have a role in determining the world in which we live.

In his essay, An Alternative Way out of the Philosophy of the Subject: Communicative versus Subject Centered Reason, Habermas's first premise is the potential to lose the alienating stance of the observer when one enters into communicative interaction with others (1987, 296-297). By virtue of our language, we comprehend each pronoun involved in communicating with others in a group, the I- you- he- she- we- they. With the goal of coordinating action, in search of mutual understanding, one may become participant rather than opposing other, seeing oneself not as object among other objects. "Then ego stands within an interpersonal relationship that allows him to relate to himself as a participant in an interaction from the perspective of alter" (Habermas 1987, 297).

According to Habermas, the origin of rationality is not found in the isolated subject but in the communicatively achieved activity of coordinating activity. The success of such coordination depends on the effort of the participants to arrive at mutual understanding. Habermas identifies the building block of this communicative process in the statement of validity claims which a participant is prepared to defend. Following Kant, Habermas identifies three types of validity claims: truth claims which are related to instrumental rationality; normative legitimacy / practical claims which are related to moral - practical rationality; aesthetic – expressive claims which are related to aesthetic – expressive rationality.

While Baudrillard and Lyotard take up the classical academic posture of describing the world as an objective other, Habermas, in The Theory of Communicative Action (1984), describes the micro process of communication that involves all of us. He emphasizes how action may only be coordinated through participants expressing and

defending claims of trueness - rightness - truthfulness. It is reasons that carry a position taken, or are the force of it being dismissed. This process starts early in childhood and carries us through our institutional and personal commitments as adults. Neither spirit nor abstract principle is postulated to be at work. It is our everyday life practice.

From the perspective of this moment to moment involvement in communication, Habermas recognizes distortions in the progression of the modern world. The claims we make in micro process involve truth claims, a reference to something about the world which we may argue is a fact; secondly, normative legitimacy / practical claims which refer to our understanding of how the social world in which we live operates. This is normative and is frequently in the form of what one should do according to the standards of one's social milieu; thirdly, aesthetic—expressive claims which testify to the sincerity, the authenticity of statements. This is an assessment which is expressed regarding whether one had meant what one has said. The validity claims of micro-communication correspond to types of social action and types of rationality which operate in larger spheres of social life.

Instrumental rationality involves necessity. What we do in order to survive. We have to reason the most appropriate engagement with the world we take as fact. We reason what works and what doesn't, what can be used and what cannot be used, and why. We seek a form of mastery in order to survive in the world. What works is taken as fact. Truth claims are employed in this form of rationality and it is the domain taken up by science. Science and technology are means to know and control the world of facts.

Habermas makes a distinction that Lyotard makes when the latter refers to denotative and prescriptive statements. Habermas distinguishes the two dimensions: the

nature of facts and the nature of legitimacy. Theory is discourse about facts regarding the physical or social worlds. Norms and values can be factual, having effect, but discussion or agreement to them is not factual. It is ethical or practical. It forms a separate discourse and type of rationality, moral-practical rationality. While the concern of instrumental rationality is truth, the concern of moral-practical rationality is justice. Like the work of Karl Marx, Habermas combines these two types of rationality in his theory of communicative action: he develops theory for the purpose of explanation, and on this basis offers guidance in terms of what needs to be done.

The third type of rationality is aesthetic-expressive. The aesthetic is related to concerns of beauty and sincerity and forms a separate type of discourse having its own form of validity claims. Assessments are made about the appreciation of art and the artistic, and the motives, the sincerity of people and sources of information. For the purposes of this dissertation, I retain from The Theory of Communicative Action Habermas' original formulation of the three types of rationality. In his later book, Between Facts and Norms (1996), Habermas suggests dividing the assessments of beauty and sincerity into two discrete types of rationality, aesthetic rationality and expressive rationality, respectively. I'm following Habermas' original adherence to the structure of Immanuel Kant's differentiation of three types of rationality. There is an intuitive link between beauty, authenticity and sincerity that may have been more readily perceptible in the time of Kant than for those subject to the objectified forms of beauty pervading the mass media of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries.

Habermas argues that the three distinctions made in regards to rationality are a defining feature of communicative competence and distinguish modern from pre-modern

societies. While a conversation, informal or formal, involves all three types of rationality, it is our ability to distinguish the arguments appropriate to its type of rationality which is fundamental to our communicative competence. Pre-modern society is characterized by a mixing of truth, normative legitimacy and aesthetic-expressive validity claims without consistently comprehending them according to their sphere of relevance.

### **3.3 Lifeworld Colonization**

Habermas (1984) constructs the argument that all communication is directed toward rational consensus, that is, mutual understanding and agreement. Rational consensus is achieved on the basis of the best argument, as opposed to agreement based on force or deception. Habermas (1987a) relates his theory of communicative competence to his theory of societal rationalization to constitute his theory of communicative action. He delineates economy and state as elements of “system;” identity, sociality and culture as elements of the “lifeworld”. Functional rationality refers to the patterns of interrelationships which are not structured on the basis of the communicative relationships which constitute the lifeworld. Instead, non-linguistic media are operating. In the economy, the medium is money. With regard to the state, the medium is power. In these sub-spheres which constitute “system”, the goals are not consensus. Goals are dictated by the structural requirements of the subsystem. Habermas identifies lifeworld colonization when the functional rationality of the system dominates interaction in the lifeworld. Lifeworld colonization refers to the penetration of the communicative rationality of the lifeworld by the functional rationality of the system. According to Habermas, the problems of modernity emerge from this penetration, the

breakdown of consensus in everyday lives. Common thought and action reduce to dull interiority, as examined by Nietzsche. This is the loss of species being expressed by Marx. To Habermas, modernity would be redeemed through lifeworld rationalization: the public achievement of rational consensus.

Following the logic of Habermas, we are situated in a particular moment in modern development, the result of a one-sided rationalization of society. Instrumental rationality, the formulation of specific means to achieve specific ends, constitutes functional rationality. The public sphere where citizens make known and justify their concerns is collapsing under pressure from system requirements of the economy, polity and mass media (Rosenau 1992, 101). Alienation results from the truncation of the triply constituted human competence for communication by the purely means-end constitution of instrumental rationality.

Habermas identifies that which liberates the human ego: participation with others in common cause, coordinating action through reasoned argument. This is the existentialism of the 1950's and 1960's advocating *l'engagement*, without the nihilistic philosophy looming behind it. The common effort to reach mutual understanding in the face of potential conflict generates the concrete experience of social cohesion, a world all too alive and suddenly wider than oneself, beautiful and challenging in its overwhelming complexity, a world of which one senses one is a part while it penetrates one to one's very core. It is Habermas then who is presenting a different model for social science activity, distinct from the classical "thinker". Habermas realigns modernity in view of the goals of rationality as collective discipline, communication as problem solving, forming the basis for modernity's only resource for social cohesion. Mutual understanding is

foundational for problem solving, presupposing truthfulness on the part of the interlocutors.

Much of the controversy over the legitimation of modernity and modern science centers on the role of reason. To the extent that the advocates of postmodernity employ reason to formulate and advance their conceptions, reason as a central function in human communication appears secure. If we discount the tendency since the work of Nietzsche to attempt to undermine reason and conceive of a postmodern era, the performative contradiction of Nietzsche and those following his legacy is relieved and we are better able to appreciate their contributions.

Lyotard rejects mutual understanding and consensus as being within the purview of human behavior. Following Nietzsche, he assumes agonistic relations between people, that is, relations of conflict, struggle (Denzin 1986, 199). In this way, Habermas and Lyotard complement each other. Lyotard would have us investigate the ownership of the databanks which now are managed to impact our lives. Lyotard conflates efficiency with power, by which he means control. He assumes, not a loss of the social bond that Baudrillard formulates, but one based on antagonistic relations (Denzin 1986, 200). According to Habermas, efficiency also brings benefits to the public. Below I will examine how Cohen and Arato (1988) note the utility of Habermas' dual aspect model of society (lifeworld-system) for the recognition of both the emancipatory and constrictive dimensions of institution-building in modern capitalism.

With regards to the debate above, we benefit from the contributions of each stream of thought: the will to power as it transforms our efforts towards consensus, and vice versa. It is within the strain of this debate that I locate my analysis of the



development of the International Township of Auroville. But I do not focus on power in the Dionysian sense, on the individual delight and expression of it. The database which is the source of my analysis brings into my reach debate on, contributing factors to, and development of, the organizational features of the township. Therefore I focus on the evolution of the political subsystem, the systematization of power, or more precisely the dialectical relationship between consensus-building and the systemization of power. In Habermasian terms, I examine the boundaries between lifeworld and system, the political subsystem in particular. To examine development of both the economic and political subsystems is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Yet the political subsystem is analytically the more inclusive of the two subsystems in the Auroville context. The economic is central to this dissertation. Because Auroville is a collective, the economic sphere is an integral feature of political will-formation.

The principal concern for consensus in the public sphere is common to both Jurgen Habermas and Auroville. Habermas' conception of the colonization of the lifeworld is at one and the same time a frame from which to comprehend (1) struggles in Auroville towards the building of an international model town; (2) the experience of increasing alienation in modern western contexts, and; (3) efforts to correct the conventional comprehension of the subject and the role of rationality.

Debate regarding the nature and desirability of "modernity" has continued for two hundred years, from the original conservative reaction (Zeitlin, 2001) to today's postmodern rejection of it. Habermas (1984; 1987a) is arguably the leading critical defender of a reformed modernity. Encroachment of communication-based living relations by the functional system is embedded in Habermas' concept of colonization of

the lifeworld and is a prevalent theme motivating action and reaction in Auroville. Similarly, the postmodern reaction to modern subjectivity and systems parallels the general aspiration of Auroville participants to surpass conventionally rational resolutions to key community concerns. Auroville activity over 25 years is analyzed as a testing ground of a pragmatic, communication-based approach to the problem of modernity, the tensions and challenges generated, the opportunities it creates for progress.

### **3.4 The Significance of Habermas' Shift in Epistemology**

The broad theoretical context of this dissertation is the problem of modernity. Thus far I have examined three social philosophers, two of which identify themselves as postmodern, Jean Baudrillard and Francois Lyotard, and one as modern, Jurgen Habermas. The former ascribe a *faites accomplis* to the problem of modernity, the pervasiveness and inscrutability of its systemic distortions. In regards to their approach to the issue, they suggest a positivistic philosophy because they report observations as regularities of an external world taken to be fact. They advocate new adaptations to a new era called the postmodern. Positivism as an orientation to philosophy and science developed with the advent of modernity. They are not positivist social scientists to the extent that they do not undertake disciplined tests of their hypotheses in the empirical world. Rather, they appeal to the pre-modern status of *pundit*, wise observer and teacher.

Habermas' work is distinctively different to the positivist epistemology. He recognizes the problem of modernity in the systematic truncation of the locally accomplished communication of concrete social actors who are intrinsically capable of rebuilding the modern world. His epistemology is rooted in pragmatism. His theory of

communicative action is undertaken to identify both the distortions of the social world and the means to address them. Rationality is not something available to the individual and then applied, according to Habermas it is something accomplished between social actors addressing the problems in their immediate context and beyond.

Habermas by emphasizing consensus is taking up a moral active position and placing social scientists in an active role with specific ends, congruent with the enlightenment; Baudrillard by saying that that moment has passed (1983, 133) is taking up a purely objectivist position, positing an external world that operates according to certain laws. In like fashion, Lyotard also describes a reified postmodern situation in regards to which he recommends certain adaptations. Although following Nietzsche with respect to his concern for aesthetics and power, Baudrillard and Lyotard fail to take up Nietzsche's telos: to use rational means to arrive at the contradiction of rationality, the "other" of rationality. It is in fact Habermas who suggests an "other", realized by means of rational and disciplined coordination of action.

Habermas' emphasis on inter-subjectivity, communicatively accomplished, removes him from the limitations of the philosophy of the subject. He recognizes not only social constraints but also the conditions through which social actors may participate in personal and social change. Primarily he removes himself from the notion of the subject as only "subject to" social conditions, the negative dialectic which he identified with the thinking of Adorno (Habermas 1987: 1), by identifying the communicative conditions through which participants learn. Communicative action has the potential to free participants from the confines of themselves and their social milieu by engaging the source of their subjectivity, each other. Derrida (in Corlett 1989) echoes this view in his

analysis of language when he reverses the relationship between language and principle, reason and folly. Principles arise in language use before they are canonized. The creativity whose loss Nietzsche lamented is found in taking up common cause with others. A principle is undetermined until it is looked back upon. Hence Habermas developed an analytical frame with the purpose of evoking the recognition of opportunities for creative action, rather than simply share astute observations to form general evaluations of the modern condition, à la Baudrillard and Lyotard.

In the sections below, I refer to elements of Habermas' discourse ethics which he elaborated in greater detail following publication of The Theory of Communicative Action in Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action (1990). I draw primarily from William Rehg's Insight and Solidarity: The Discourse Ethics of Jurgen Habermas (1991). These elements of discourse ethics are foundational to Habermas' theory of communicative action. I then highlight the features of Habermas' lifeworld-system duality that Cohen and Arato (1988) specify and extend for their reconstruction of a theory of civil society. I present these two lines of Habermas' thinking in response to John F. Sitton's critique of Habermas from a left realist perspective. According to Sitton, Habermas underplays the role of social class, and the centrality of "interest", to social change. Sitton criticizes the theory of communicative action for the consequent loss of analytic competence.

### **3.4.1 A Left Realist Challenge to Habermas**

In Habermas and Contemporary Society, John F. Sitton (2003) offers an account of the work of Habermas to date. One of the major strengths of the book is Sitton's

presentation of the theoretical antecedents to Habermas's work. Like others, Sitton identifies Habermas's concerns with the previous contributions of Weber, Lukacs, Horkheimer and Adorno, and Marcuse. In this way Sitton grounds Habermas's work in Weber's thesis that societal rationalization emerges from pre-existing cultural rationalization. A major thrust of Sitton's book is his Marxian corrective of Habermas's theories. Sitton emphasizes in this section Habermas's deviations from Marx.

In succeeding chapters, Sitton elaborates the major components of Habermas's theoretical framework. He follows Habermas's own explanatory strategy: He describes rationality as an outcome of communicative processes, i.e., the posing and defending of validity claims, the elaboration of system from this "lifeworld", the colonization of the lifeworld by system, and Habermas's conceptualization of the public sphere as practical redress to this one-sided rationalization of the modern world.

Before proceeding to his own critique of Habermas, Sitton outlines three current general critiques. Postmodernists find untenable Habermas's emphasis on consensus; Habermas has been criticized for having a sterile conception of social life. In their view, consensus plays out in actual terms as a form of domination. Second, Habermas is criticized for paying little attention to his third type of rationality, the aesthetic-expressive. Sitton demonstrates recognition on the part of Habermas that this criticism is justified. In his later works, Habermas suggests a differentiation of the aesthetic from the expressive, to form potentially four types of rationality as opposed to three. Thirdly, Sitton demonstrates Habermas's acceptance of many feminist critiques with regard to his inadequate attention to gender dynamics. In this section, Sitton is skilful in both outlining the critiques and Habermas's response to them.

The final chapters of the book involve Sitton's critiques, and projected utility of, Habermas's theory. Sitton disagrees with Habermas that capitalism as currently constituted renders class conflict "latent" (2003, 35). Moreover, the disassembling of the welfare state in recent times potentially brings class conflict again to the fore. While Sitton may see Habermas and him agreeing to this latter point, Sitton argues that the effectiveness of Habermas's theory is put in jeopardy in general by the lack of attention Habermas pays to social class. Habermas places his hopes on a renewed project of modernity on the increasing effectiveness of the public sphere. Sitton argues that in the absence of class analysis, Habermas does not have sufficient grasp of the dynamics of "interest" to render an effective analysis. Moreover, Sitton interweaves his critique of Habermas with reference to quotes by Habermas which characterize him as caught in functionalist explanations of system. Sitton argues that Habermas's project, although useful, does not replace classical Marxian analysis with regard to social transformation: "class relations expressed through property forms focuses our attention on the social structures that embody capitalism, and, arguably, govern its historical trajectory" (2003, 157). Sitton argues convincingly that class analysis based on the Marxian tradition remains a cogent form of analysis with respect to current conflicts. He concludes that Habermas's theory seriously de-emphasizes the role of class and therefore the obstructions class conflict will erect in regards to Habermas's emancipatory project based on uncoerced communication. At the same time, it is left unclear to the reader the extent to which Habermas objects to this point of view. Unlike the treatment of Habermas in the previous section, the reader of this section notes the paucity of substantive responses included on behalf of Habermas.

Sitton's presentation and analysis of Habermas leaves gaps in the logic of Habermas's methodical theory development. This makes Sitton's position vulnerable to criticism. In the first half of the book, Sitton minimizes the contributions Habermas incorporates into his own work of George Herbert Mead, and therefore Habermas's substantial correspondence to American pragmatism. Habermas's treatment of modern subject formation as a dialectical achievement in communicative acts is underplayed. Without this substantial component of Habermas's thinking coming to the fore, a stream of concern throughout his work, it is possible for Sitton to make Habermas appear as a classical functionalist with regard to the treatment of system. Habermas is made to appear indistinct from Talcott Parsons. The irony is that the second volume of Habermas's The Theory of Communicative Action, is a critique of functionalist reasoning. According to Braaten:

A functionalist explanation of the systems that integrate the complex interactions within a society is not genuinely explanatory, for Habermas, unless one first achieves an understanding of the lifeworld of that society from the participant's point of view, for the limits of the participant's point of view and norms on which it is based are limiting conditions on the development and differentiation of the economic and administrative systems. (1991, 78-79)

Habermas's comprehension of system remains grounded in his emphasis on interpersonal communication.

Sitton demonstrates his distinctively different political and analytical orientation to Habermas in the final paragraph of the book in which Sitton asserts that "reason without revolution is not possible" (2003, 157). In the end, Sitton asserts a left realist approach while Habermas seeks to achieve a different approach based on the identifiable communicative capacity found in concrete human behaviour. Habermas has shifted dramatically from a realist to a pragmatist epistemology. It is this decidedly different

epistemology presented by Habermas's work that Sitton does not fully explain for his readers. This leaves the debate regarding the class conflict / communicative action approaches to conflict in society unresolved in Sitton's text.

Cohen and Arato (1988) assert that Habermas has found a way between the options of tearing down the system, as Sitton advocates, or conforming anxiously to systems to which one does not agree. From his foundational framework construction in the Theory of Communicative Action, Habermas worked extensively on elaborating discourse ethics through which he does indeed make "interests" central. By virtue of emphasizing the expression of needs and interests through language, he worked to demonstrate the genesis of social norms, guiding apparatuses for social interaction, which become of general benefit when all those concerned may participate in their formulation. Moral norms for Habermas are those that underlay the substantive content of moral prescription which may vary widely from group to group. Moral discourse involves the participation of all those who would be affected by the norms. Building on the work of the American pragmatist, George Herbert Mead, Habermas attempts in his program of discourse ethics to emphasize the intersubjective quality of rational will-formation laying the foundation for social learning. If all concerned may participate in the formulation of the norms which guide social behaviour, the potential of each participant is addressed while the potential for social change is created. This personal / interpersonal potential unleashed by uncoerced communication is a framework for practice shared by Habermas and the residents of Auroville. Far from underplaying the role of "interests", for which Sitton criticizes Habermas, the latter identifies them in the context of their expression thereby recognizing the potential in communication for social change. The Marxian



realism from which Sitton addresses his critique is answered pragmatically by Habermas. Since communication generates both the actor's subjectivity and the rules and regulations by which behaviour is guided in a social context, communicative action is the potential means to affect change, guided by the moral universals identified in discourse ethics.

Where (U) stands for universality, this involves:

- (U) A norm is reached on the basis of good reasons, and a rational consensus thereby attained, if and only if
  - (a) each of those affected can convince the others, in terms they hold appropriate for the perception of both their own and others' interests, that the constraints and impacts of a norm's general observance are acceptable for all; and
  - (b) each can be convinced by all, in terms she or he considers appropriate, that the constraints and impacts of norm's general observance are acceptable for all. (Rehg 1994, 75)

Far from taking up a functionalist orientation as Sitton accuses, Habermas recognizes the limits of system set by the communicatively steered lifeworld:

the moral perspective renders domains of strategic action permeable with respect to a larger cooperative context, at least in principle, inasmuch as affected parties can bring to discourse the adverse effects or unequal burdens of a given form of "system integration," i.e., an anonymous form of social coordination through nonlinguistic media. (Rehg 1994, 173)

To deny the role of rational will-formation, communicative action, in the transformation of modern society over time begs the observation that the capitalist mode of production is substantially different today in comparison to the rampant exploitation of labour in Great Britain during Marx's lifetime, accomplished without revolution. Much of the improvement in the conditions of labour evolved through the efforts of "old social movements", movements which attempted to change systems from within, such as the labour movement. Following Alain Touraine, "new social movements" typify those

currently operating which attempt to affect change from outside the systems. In a later section, I will draw on an author of postmodern orientation to identify Auroville as an intentional community appropriately considered a “new social movement.” In that section, I will show that authors of differing perspectives, especially those selected of postmodern orientation, complement Habermas’ frame of maximizing difference of “interest” as opportunity, rather than irreversible seed for revolution or despondent conformity. It is when norms and values are put in question, when there is potential for conflict, that Habermas recognizes the opportunity for moral discourse to arise as participants search for a resolution to the crisis. To Habermas, the crisis must be met rationally (read inter-subjectively) to be considered moral discourse. Rehag encapsulates Habermas:

If rational cooperation represents the constitutive good of discourse ethics, and if such cooperation turns on the rational conviction of those involved, then this good enjoys a privileged status: the intersubjectivity of rational conviction represents a dynamic that cuts across particular cultures and destabilizes modes of coordination that deny the solidaristic basis of will-formation. This solidarity existing at the heart of practical insight constitutes an immanent disposition, as it were – inhering in language use itself – to subject social coordination to processes of mutual understanding. Alternatives must therefore rely on mechanisms that counteract this disposition, mechanisms that become increasingly costly. (1994, 171)

Two points of relevance to Auroville may be drawn from the “intersubjectivity of rational conviction” described above. It is a theoretical basis for the principle of consensus to which Aurovilians have chosen to adhere. Secondly, to the extent that Habermas’ claim of universality may be applied in this way, the “intersubjectivity of rational conviction” may constitute an explanation for the endurance of Auroville’s multi-cultural experiment defined by both consensual decision-making and growth and

refinements in organization from 1975 to the year 2000. Auroville is an extreme form of multicultural diversity, standing in sharp contrast to current developments in Europe.

There are further correspondences to be made. Habermas in Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action draws upon a catalogue of presuppositions of argumentation developed by R. Alexy (1978) to add specificity to his conception of discourse ethics (1990, 86-92). They are also called rules of discourse. Habermas refers to them as “pragmatic presuppositions” because participants in discourse necessarily follow them whether they are aware of them or not. They presuppose participation. Following Aristotle, Alexy’s scheme involves three levels of presuppositions: “those at the logical level of products, those at the dialectical level of procedures, and those at the rhetorical level of processes” (Habermas 1990, 87). The first level pertains to consistency and avoiding contradiction, the second to “accountability and truthfulness” to which Habermas himself adds “jurisdiction and relevance” (1990, 87). The third level pertains to processes of argumentation:

- (3.1) Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse.
- (3.2)
  - a. Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever.
  - b. Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse.
  - c. Everyone is allowed to express his attitudes, desires, and needs.
- (3.3) No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down in (3.1) and (3.2). (Habermas 1990, 89)

In an ideal sense, these presuppositions constitute the foundation for participation in rational argumentation. The principle (U) does not obtain:

Unless all affected can freely accept the consequences and the side effects that the general observance of a controversial norm can be expected to have for the satisfaction of the interest of each individual. (Habermas 1990, 93)

Habermas then derives his principle of discourse ethics (D):

Only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as participants in a practical discourse. (1990, 93)

The principle of Universalization (U) then “is conceived as a rule of argumentation and is part of the logic of practical discourses” (Habermas 1990, 93). The principle (U) forms the basis of the principle of discourse ethics (D). In Chapters Five and Six, I will demonstrate adherence in Auroville to (U) by virtue of the free participation in decision-making that is consistent with presuppositions (3.1) to (3.3) above, and the principle (D). In this way, I justify the application in Chapter Six of societal rationalization elements of the theory of communicative action to development in Auroville: the principles which form the foundation of Habermas’ conception of communicative action (communicative rationality) correspond to principles of organization which inform practical discourse in Auroville making the latter a legitimate testing ground of Habermas’ theory.

In the section to follow, I examine relevant aspects of Cohen and Arato’s reconstruction of a theory of civil society. Their reconstruction from Habermas’ communicative action perspective identifies transition points in his theory from interpersonal communication to social organization. Their contribution strengthens the potential for Habermas’ theoretical frame to posit substantial societal change.

### **3.5 Habermas as Foundation for a Reconstruction of a Theory of Civil Society**

Although making reference to it, Habermas did not elaborate a theory of civil society. Cohen and Arato (1988) bring to the fore significant features of Habermas’

thinking by elaborating a theory of civil society in the context of his lifeworld-system duality. By so doing, they not only demonstrate the utility of his dual conceptualization of society, but also demonstrate how it may form the bases for social change. They conceive of civil society as the institutional sphere of lifeworld. According to Habermas, civil society has both a private and a public sphere, family and public opinion formation, respectively. The table below breaks down lifeworld and system according to public and private spheres.

Table 3.1. The public and private spheres of lifeworld and system (Cohen and Arato 1988, 205)

|                  | <b>Public</b>                  | <b>Private</b> |
|------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>System</b>    | state                          | economy        |
| <b>Lifeworld</b> | public<br>opinion<br>formation | family         |

Compared to equating the state with the public sphere and economy with the private, the breakdown of lifeworld and system into public and private spheres multiplies the exchanges one may recognize between spheres (Cohen and Arato 1988, 205).

Cohen describes three theses that she considers Habermas contributes to an understanding of the modernizing efforts of current social movements: systemization of the state and the economy unburdens the communicative capacity of lifeworld allowing for its modernization; the non-linguistic media of system penetrates lifeworld truncating its potential for modernization, and; the institutions of lifeworld are two-sided, characterized by the potential for both domination and emancipation (1995, 58-59). In Chapter Six, I will apply the three theses to the development of Auroville putting in question the necessity of system to operate autonomously. Modernization in the Auroville

case advances with a direct link between the communicative rationality of lifeworld and the functional rationality of system. Cohen postulates sensors in system through which lifeworld concerns may affect the operation of system (1995, 59). Secondly, she asserts that it is through “rights” that modernization of the lifeworld is secured in the face of pressures on the part of system. Habermas generated ambiguity with regards to the effect lifeworld may continue to assert on system following its delinking from lifeworld. He used phrases such as “norm-free sociality” to describe system (Rehg 1994, 173-174). For the purpose of this dissertation I will take the following direction by Habermas clearly indicating the potential for lifeworld influence on system. The case of Auroville maintains this direction without securing “rights” because the link between lifeworld and system has never been lost.

In subsystems differentiated out via steering media, systemic mechanisms create their own, norm-free social structures jutting out from the lifeworld. These structures do, of course, remain linked with everyday communicative practice via basic institutions of civil or public law. We cannot directly infer from the mere fact that system and social integration have largely uncoupled to linear dependency in one direction or the other. Both are conceivable: the institutions that anchor steering mechanisms such as power and money in the lifeworld could serve as a channel either for the influence of the lifeworld on formally organized domains of action or, conversely, for the influence of the system on communicatively structured contexts of action. In the one case, they function as an institutional framework that subjects system maintenance to the normative restrictions of the lifeworld, in the other, as a base that subordinates the lifeworld to the systemic constraints of material reproduction and thereby “mediatizes” it. (Habermas 1984, 185)

Rehg footnotes that Cohen (1995), and Honneth (1991) have, on the other hand, taken the view following other phrases in The Theory of Communicative Action Volume Two that Habermas intends system be viewed as autonomous to lifeworld in a definitive sense. The theoretical analysis of Chapter Six focuses on this “seam between system and

lifeworld” (Cohen 1995, 61) thereby responding to the controversy over lifeworld effects on system.

Cohen argues that by reconstructing the concept of civil society in the context of the duality of lifeworld–system, Habermas’ own rigidity in terms of the separation of these two domains is addressed. Secondly, the concept of civil society allows for the recognition of the potential for both the emancipatory and the constrictive sides of lifeworld institutions. Habermas identifies a range of movements as defensive including those which seek to protect traditional forms of life to those which act to protect and democratize the communicative rationality of the lifeworld in the face of increasing lifeworld colonization (1987a, 391-396). With regards to the latter, Habermas’ relegation of most contemporary social movements as defensive may be expanded to include recognition of their offensive side, their potential for activating institutional change both within the lifeworld and to a limited degree, in the subsystems (Cohen 1995, 63). It would be interesting to gauge how Habermas would classify Auroville in his scheme of defensive / offensive. It is explicitly universalist in its invitation to everyone on the planet to use it as a testing ground for human unity. On a practical level it holds to this universalist claim by maintaining no private property and open political participation based on the first article of the Auroville Charter “Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole.” It seeks to work out institutional and systemic change on a small scale to be made available on a large scale in keeping with this ideal of Auroville as laboratory for humanity as a whole. Therefore it is universalist in terms of the inclusive and egalitarian principles that it maintains and offensive in terms of working on substantial change to political and economic subsystems

(as a working model). Habermas' defensive/offensive scheme (Cohen 1995, 61-62) relies on the dichotomies of particularist/universalist, orientated to communicative rationality / institutional change. With regards to both dimensions, Auroville appears offensive. Cohen criticizes Habermas for failing to recognize the potential for new social movements to secure substantial institutional change in the lifeworld (1995, 62). She argues that a theory of civil society would correct this shortcoming.

Cohen and Arato elaborate in four separate points the theoretical gains derived when the duality of lifeworld–system constitutes the framework for a concept of civil society (1988, 202-210). In Chapter Six, these four points constitute a frame from which to analyze the contributions in Auroville to the modernization process.

(1) The elaboration of different institutionalized spheres, cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical and aesthetic-expressive, identified by Weber as cultural modernization provides a range of shared meanings actors may draw upon or renegotiate relative to each sphere. Such modernization involves the dissolution of “a traditionalistic relationship to tradition” therefore opening up opportunity for autonomy and group formation characterized by integration without uniformity (1988, 203).

A modernized lifeworld involves the communicative opening up of the sacred core of traditions, norms and authority to processes of questioning and discursive adjudication. It entails the replacement of a conventionally-based normative consensus by one that is reflexive, post-conventional, and grounded in open processes of communication. (1988, 202)

(2) Moral / practical and aesthetic domains in modernity are truncated (1988, 203-204). This distortion of modernity arises not from the differentiation of value spheres but from the penetration of one-sidedly rationalized economic and administrative subsystems into an already modernizing lifeworld (lifeworld colonization). The selective pattern of



institutionalization by the encroachment of system leads to a loss of freedom: “Acting subjects become subordinated to the imperatives of apparatuses which have become autonomous and substitutes for communicative interaction”(1988, 204). Increased “bureaucratization and individualization” creates dependencies and destroys solidarities. Social situations are reconstituted and treated as individual cases accompanied by increasing monetization (1988, 206). By virtue of recognizing the “negativity of modern civil society” (1988, 203) with the colonization of the lifeworld rather than with modernity per se (Weber), Habermas’ theory allows for recognition of “the two-sided character of institutional developments in contemporary civil society” (1988, 207). Institutional developments bring both negative and positive outcomes. In addition to increasing efficiency in the economic and administrative domains, differentiation of the economy and polity leads to the potential for the lifeworld to be modernized – “a post-conventional culture of civil society” (1988, 204).

(3) Civil society involves alternative potentials that Cohen and Arato call “institutional doubleness” (1988, 207). According to Habermas, law may function as a “medium” by which money and power penetrate lifeworld (1988, 207-208) or an “institution” which secures “the normative accomplishments of the lifeworld” (1988, 208). Similarly, socialization of children in schools may involve a loss of family authority and the “ego autonomy of the children” or it may release “potential for communicative interaction in this sphere” (1988, 209). Habermas also makes the argument with regards to mass media in which its centralization may be countered by its use in “non-hierarchical ways” (1988, 208-209). Cohen and Arato assert that outcomes of this “dualistic structure of the institutions of civil society” (1988, 207) depend on “the

dual possibilities inherent in modern associational life: on the one side, the reduction of associational life to formal, bureaucratic and closed organizations (corporatists systems), on the other, the revitalization of voluntary associations through internally democratic, open and public forms of group life” (1988, 209).

(4) By the “utopia of civil society”, Cohen and Arato refer to the potential in civil society for a “self-limiting radical democracy” (1988, 209). By maintaining the boundaries between the subsystems and lifeworld, associational forms, communicatively and democratically coordinated, could replace traditional forms where relevant to allow for the full rationalization of all institutions. The radical democracy is “self-limiting” because of “the restriction of the communicative coordination of action to the institutional core of civil society itself and, thus, to an indirect influence on other spheres” (1988, 210). The idea of free association central to earlier conceptions of civil society remains (1988, 209), but is recognized in the context of the differentiation and efficiency central to modernity and is therefore limited (1988, 210). This conception of civil society is based on Habermas’ contention that the differentiation of the subsystems unburdens lifeworld allowing for its modernization, that is, communicative coordination. Differentiation of a “non-state public sphere and a non-economic private sphere” (1988, 210) as outlined in table 3.1 is central to this “project of self-limiting, radical democracy” (1988, 209). This vision of civil society forms the basis for a democratic ideal supported by the efficiency characteristic of modern systems which through their ultimate dependence on lifeworld, respond to the normative concerns of civil society (1988, 210).

Cohen and Arato state that the heart of their project is to reconstruct civil society theoretically and practically: “translation of the relevant dimensions of the life-world as

‘civil society’ is needed to make sense of the double political task of self-limiting, radical democracy: the acquisition of influence by publics on the state and economy, and the institutionalization of the gains of movements within the life-world” (1988, 211). They assert that without a further democratization of the state and economy, the “autonomous institutions of civil society” would be “vulnerable” to the “powerful organizations of the two subsystems” (1988, 213). One analytic point of my dissertation is that quasi state and economic subsystems in Auroville continue to be influenced by lifeworld communicatively, rather than through steering mechanisms anchored in lifeworld as stated by Habermas in the quote above. Therefore organization in Auroville responds to Cohen and Arato’s concern for the further democratization of the state and economy. In their view, modernization / rationalization is key to the decolonization / democratization of civil society, and how it must work through its sensors in the subsystems to democratize them. Identifying the pattern of modernization / rationalization in Auroville from the Habermasian communicative paradigm as articulated in the four points above is taken up in Chapter Six.

Cohen and Arato conceive of continuity in system maintenance. Democratization occurs in the institutions of the economic and state subsystems through the establishment of public spaces within them that form part of a “network of societal communication consisting of public spheres, associations, and movements” (Cohen and Arato 1988, 214). The database analysis of Chapter Five identifies the role networking plays in Auroville in maintaining a measure of communicative coordination of the quasi state and economic subsystems.

Cohen and Arato direct their reconstruction of a theory of civil society within a Habermasian framework towards “a partially new set of rights with communication rather than property rights as their core” (1988, 215). Hence their vision and that of the intentional development of the International Township of Auroville coincide. Drawing on the first article of its Charter, “Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole”, Aurovilians have historically asserted and maintained the replacement of property rights with the right to participate in decision-making. Secondly, Cohen and Arato envision development of political will-formation that corresponds to struggles over decision-making practices in the Township. They envision:

...the creation of forms of social control over state and economy (through the expansion of sets of representative institutions within and between them) that are compatible with a modernized lifeworld. The two steps presupposes each other: only an adequately defended, differentiated and organized civil society is capable of monitoring and influencing the outcomes of steering processes, but only a civil society capable of influencing the state and economy can help to maintain the structure of rights that are the sine qua non of its own existence. (1988, 215)

Cohen and Arato’s articulation of Habermas’ theory of communicative action in their project to formulate a renewed conceptualization of civil society provides a means to translate the experience of lifeworld rationalization in Auroville and its role in system development to the broader social world outside its borders. In the next section, I widen my range of academic references to exemplars of positivist, postmodernist and feminist scholars two of whom justify conceptualizing an intentional community such as the International Township of Auroville as a project which directly addresses the problem of modernity.

### **3.6 Intentional Community as Response to the Problem of Modernity**

In this section, I cite authors who take up concern for intentional community as effort to resolve the problem of modernity. The authors I've selected demonstrate a range of positivist, modernist, postmodernist and feminist concerns relevant to the topic.

Smith identifies the fundamental concern of sociologists with the transition from Gemeinschaft way of life to a Gesellschaft world (1996, 258). Zygmunt Bauman (2001) takes up this concern for loss of community from a postmodern perspective. He describes the tension between security and freedom intrinsic to human community tipping towards freedom on an ideological level with modernity (2001, 19-23). According to him, it manifests for most people in loss of both security and freedom because of the breakdown of community concomitant with participation in industrial society. In pre-capitalist community, work was typically meaningful in its connection to every other dimension of community living. These connections had to be broken to ensure a supply of "free labour" for capitalist industry (2001, 27-28). One of Bauman's concerns is "rerooting the uprooted" (2001, 21), that is, the character of current efforts to reestablish community. Bauman endeavors in his monograph, Community, to take stock of efforts made to cope with the dilemma of security and freedom.

On the basis of his research and his review of the literature, Smith considers communalists to be striving to address alienation and the negative effects of modernity. Smith surveys the scholarly work to date on intentional communities focusing on definitional issues, utopianism and communitarianism, trends, reasons for their development, communal types and ideological bases, examples and numbers of such communities in North America (1996). The efforts in this field to this time were clearly

positivist in approach, particularly with the purpose to typologize internal dimensions of these communities in order to conduct variable research. Smith concludes “the lessons of communal life, its failures and triumphs, might possibly empower us to fix the social problems that plague modern industrial society” (1996, 257). He adds that a major gap in the research is the development of criteria to evaluate the success of communities beyond consideration for longevity. For the purpose of my dissertation, I connect these two concerns. By framing the results of the data analysis of Auroville’s development over 25 years (1975-2000) with Habermas’ theory of communicative action, I emphasize Auroville’s attempts to respond to the problem of modernity. According to Cohen and Arato, “success at the level of civil society” for those involved in social movements is “the extent that actors continue efforts to democratize values, norms, and institutions” (1992, 562). Following Smith, these may be useful criteria with which to evaluate the success of intentional communities, Auroville in particular.

Robert C. Schehr (1997) notes that although intentional communities have long been attempted, Karl Marx discounted them as “politically negligible” (1997, 31). Over time they have been considered a retreat from development rather than a resource or model. Schehr argues that they are indeed a resource demonstrating possibilities of social life and could usefully be approached analytically in this way. He views intentional communities as resistance to the distortions of the modern world. As such, they provide not only alternative opportunities for people but also conscientious responses to the problems of modernity bearing both practical and theoretical implications. He argues that intentional communities (ICs) would be appropriately recognized as constitutive of New Social Movements (NSM):

What is needed is a new conceptualization of social movements, one capable of recognizing and accentuating subaltern expressions of resistance operating within civil society at the level of the lifeworld...at the symbolic level ICs represent what is perhaps the most all-inclusive affront to dominant efforts at intensifying rationalization. (Schehr 1997, 9)

Schehr argues that intentional communities constitute a social movement typically involving an attempt “to engage the entirety of human social existence” (1997, 44). His argument situates intentional communities as new social movements but on the one hand characterizes them by resistance to lifeworld colonization and on the other hand expansion of lifeworld rationalization. Habermas would therefore classify them as “defensive”. I’m arguing, following my presentation of Cohen and Arato above, that Auroville conceptualized as a new social movement is offensive.

McCarthy counter poses Foucault and Habermas, strategic interaction versus communication free from domination (1994, 263-265). Habermas privileges communication because he believes it is the source for both subjectivity and rationality. Through discourse ethics he seeks as outcome the fullest expression of human subjectivity and creativity. From this point of view, Foucault’s emphasis on strategic action is already premised on subjectivity misidentified with the individual. Foucault’s view appears to affirm rather than seek remedy to the problem of modernity (as Habermas understands it). Foucault affirms subjectivity situated over against an objective world, distinct from subjectivity emerging through engagement in what concerns the group. Participation in consensual decision-making is one means by which the Auroville context makes community a resource for personal and collective learning and growth. According to both Smith (positivist) and Schehr (postmodernist), this opportunity for

participation contributes to what makes intentional communities pertinent to social analysis as a resource for social change (Smith 1996, 257; Schehr 1997, 49).

Corlett draws from the inverse and complementary side of Foucault's work. By means of an analysis of Jacques Derrida, William Corlett argues for the basis for "community without unity": the complementarity of reason and "deraison", reason as it emerges necessarily from its other (Corlett 1989). Recognizing the complementarity of reason and la folie, as Derrida would express it, liberates reasoning from conventional binary oppositions, such as man/woman, individual/collective, etc., in order to liberate actors from convention, not from reasoning. In such a way, reasoning moves from an act of submission to an act of creative expression.

It is at this juncture that Derrida and Habermas complement each other: Both recognize reason emerging from individual immersion in practice with others. It is from the practice that both reason and the subject emerge. William Corlett describes this as gift-giving: "To give ourselves to a practice with such intensity that our subjectivity becomes a function of the practice (instead of the other way around), is to give a gift" (1989, 185). In this way, the subject frees him/herself through contributing to the immediate whole. Corlett draws upon the work of Derrida and Foucault to draw a parallel between language-use and community. According to Derrida, language-use confines potential. Similarly, Corlett describes the binary oppositions in thought and practice that limit individual participation in community. Foucault describes such limitations as the "primitive need to expand freely turned back against the human subject, making it petty, jealous, cowardly, a seeker of glory" (Corlett 1989, 192). He echoes the concern of Karl



Marx with respect to species being. According to Corlett, Foucault (1983, 212) engages a struggle

“against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way.” Foucault refuses the sense of self produced by the simultaneous individuation and totalization of modern power structures, and affirms a self more concerned with empowerment than domination. (Corlett 1989, 188)

His conceptualization of “gift-giving” signifies to Corlett that “mutual service of community is possible without the unity of sharing anything in common” (1989, 203). No side directs the behaviour of the other, patterned subjectivity has been deferred: “a politics of community must practice gift-giving to keep the entanglement of reason and deraison from being lived as disentangled” (1989, 213).

According to Corlett, Derrida reverses the relationship between what is considered to be de facto and de jure, the world of fact and the world of principle (1989, 181). The latter is de facto because it emerges from chaos. Cognisant of the “silence of infinite possibility,” Aurovilians hesitate to break the silence by “cutting into the page” (1989, 202). Their intention is to go beyond the imposed binary oppositions to establish community, or as Corlett would state it, “community without unity.” Corlett again refers to Foucault’s concern: “how to neutralize the oppositions that disfigure being ...without eliminating the possibility of all meaning whatsoever, without sacrificing difference” (1989, 188)? In Aurovilians terms, their goal of community is to achieve “unity without uniformity”. The gap between de facto and de jure ceases to bewilder because both are recognized to be dependent on silence, non-reason and chance. Those present are the resource for both. This is the principle which Auroville and Habermas share; it is precisely what Habermas intends with his principle of (U), universality, the foundation of

his discourse ethics. Moderns have no resource for themselves, but each other. This is the “other” of rationality that Nietzsche aspired to express but failed because he sought it alone. Corlett links Foucault and Derrida to community-building making his treatment of them relevant to my analysis of Auroville. His approach to community offers insight into the apparent tolerance in Auroville for diversity, the passage of time and amount of energy involved in making very small steps in development. The significance of Auroville as intentional community is more than its objective form. It is a struggle for personal and interpersonal change. It is the practice of consensus in Auroville which makes the relevance of Corlett’s thought apparent to the observer.

Simone Chambers studied the consensual decision-making practices adopted for the Women’s Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice at Seneca, New York (1995, 163-179). She draws on Habermas’ formulation of discourse ethics and the significance he places on consensus in order to analyze the camp process and outcomes. As I outlined above with respect to McCarthy’s comparison of strategic (Foucault) versus communicative (Habermas) action, she begins her commentary noting a similar dichotomy, but from a feminist viewpoint is critical of the adoption (a la Habermas) of an ethic of justice along with communicative action.

In achieving attitudes productive for discourse, an ethic of care which accentuates responding to others (a reaching out to others) is more helpful than an ethic of justice which stresses not interfering with others (a limitation of the self). Thus, I argue that the feminist experiment in consensual will-formation points to the necessity of learning how to be discursive actors as opposed to strategic actors. (1995, 163)

Habermas does not follow the liberal ethic of justice to which Chambers refers above. His orientation is a pragmatic application of the principle (U): The justice constituted by the opportunity for all concerned to participate in open,

uncoerced communication is the basis of morality and therefore the justice which would be foundational for an ethic of care. It is in this sense that Habermas argues for the primacy of an ethic of justice (Rehg 1991). Habermas and Chambers appear to agree on “the necessity of learning how to be discursive actors.”

Chambers concludes that the experiment in consensus-building at Seneca achieved the desired sense of participation and individual empowerment appropriate to the intention “to avoid hierarchies and leadership/non-leadership stratification” (1995, 164). But it was inefficient in terms of decision-making. She argues that at the end of the process of sharing information and discussing issues, a decisive decision-making process is required to achieve closure on an issue (1995, 173-174). The time-consuming practical implications of an inefficient decision-making process for one camp held over several days are also experienced in Auroville, but they have not attenuated the drive for consensus. We will see in Chapter Six that there have been times when the Auroville public has resorted to variations on voting to find closure to an issue. We will also see that there are times when the frustration over decision-making is felt community-wide. It is a significant form of crisis in the township. We will also see renewed attempts to achieve more authentic forms of consensus.

Chambers asks how the experience of this camp for peace and justice would work out in society in general (1995, 164). She asserts that consensus-building and decision-making would be different moments in democratic process in the larger sphere.

Chambers’ analysis points to several factors that underscore the practice of consensus, such as attempts to avoid hierarchy and leadership/non-leadership stratification, and an ethic of care. I look closely in my dissertation at the consequences of consensus taken up

as “decision-making” form for community-building in the international township. What are the economic and political consequences of the “sustained” practice of consensus?

With regard to the “defensive” role Auroville plays as new social movement, Auroville community members struggle to minimize the effects of the steering media of money and power (lifeworld colonization) on the concrete development of the Auroville Township. Both their resistance and their alternative outcomes are substantial by virtue of the value they place in consensus as political ideal. Although no reference to Habermas is made, his discourse ethics have been adopted in the township since 1975 when the residents of Auroville took up decision-making. If, as Schehr argues, intentional communities constitute a social movement typically involving an attempt “to engage the entirety of human social existence” (1997, 44), the dilemmas faced by Auroville participants as a consequence of maintaining their ideal have outcomes in terms of process and development that are significant for society as a whole. Habermas offers key theoretical contributions to the dissertation because development in Auroville is mediated by uncoerced public communication. Typical of the lifeworld, the steering media in Auroville is predominantly interpersonal communication. I examine how this plays out in the township, its consequences for development.

Between 1988 and 1991, roughly midway in our database, the Central Government of India by act of parliament constituted Auroville as the Auroville Foundation, an autonomous body of the Human Resource Development Ministry. For Schehr, “the lifeworld, discursively constituted, cannot traverse the transition to system” (1997, 100). The Auroville Foundation Act of 1988, activated in 1991, marked the beginning of incremental central government involvement and direction in Auroville’s

internal development. Hence the dynamic of development in Auroville which involved lifeworld and quasi state and economic systems became increasingly colonized by an external state system. A significant dimension of the dissertation is the individual and collective response in Auroville to government participation in an experiment whose integrity and purpose is premised on individual and collective autonomy. The activation of the Auroville Foundation Act introduced ongoing collision between lifeworld and system. Is it possible for Auroville residents “to maintain authenticity while simultaneously negotiating lifeworld and system” (Schehr 1997, 63)?

Schehr recognizes the commitment in ICs to “a more holistic vision of community” in which residents perceive themselves as participating in “laboratories of what is possible within civil society” (1997, 48). He endorses Cohen and Arato’s (1992, 561) view that movements engaging with structures that organize themselves by means of media other than communicative interaction will undergo a process of “self-instrumentalization.” Action directed towards the state and/or the market economy result in internal organization “determined by power and money.” Yet Cohen and Arato (1988, 214) recognize that even within system there are “publics” and room for democratization: “The abstract categories of system and lifeworld indicate only where the weight of coordination lies in a given institutional framework” (1988, 213). With the Auroville Foundation Act, the Government of India imposed the opportunity for Auroville to articulate its values and goals with those of a modern state. The range of responses in Auroville included the call to face the challenge of a much larger field of work.

I have drawn upon concerns common to positivist (Smith), modernist (Habermas, Cohen and Arato), postmodernist (Corlett, Bauman, and Schehr) and feminist

(Chambers) authors. Both Smith and Schehr assert the relevance of ICs in addressing the “problem of modernity” and suggest that this is an IC’s measure of success; Habermas provides the analytic framework; Corlett and Schehr conceptualise community appropriate to its meaning in Auroville; Chambers provides the example of the adoption of consensus for decision-making that corresponds to the experience of it in Auroville.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY

Habermas uses the term “reconstruction” in two ways (Pedersen 2008, 482), both of which are demonstrated in The Theory of Communicative Action (1984, 1987).

Habermas reviews principal contributors to thought about modern society from Weber to Parsons, pulling their work apart, demonstrating needed correctives and then expressing his review, critique and reconstitution of them in view of his principle project of establishing a theoretical frame by which to address the problem of modernity. The second sense Habermas refers to as “reconstructive science”. The basis of his theory of communicative action is the identification of general presuppositions or “universal conditions” (1979, 1) by which actors may achieve mutual understanding. He distinguishes his reconstructive science from established empiricist and transcendental approaches to social scientific activity by demonstrating that the conditions upon which his theory is based obtain in a pre-theoretical way to the communicative activity of concern. In this way, the universal conditions for achieving mutual understanding are not theory dependent. Rather, he uses these conditions as the grounds upon which to reconstruct the theoretical work of his predecessors, by means of which he constructs his theory of communicative action. In this way, his two uses of the term “reconstruction” are related.

Habermas’ first systematic explanation of reconstructive science is found in his essay, “What is Universal Pragmatics” in Communication and the Evolution of Society (1979). He applies this approach using the term “formal pragmatics” in The Theory of

Communicative Action (1984, 1987). Formal pragmatics remains foundational to his subsequent and related elaboration of discourse ethics in Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action. (1990). Habermas identifies the theory building of Noam Chomsky, Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg as exemplifying reconstructive science because in each case they identify features which must “always already” (Karl-Otto Apel in Habermas 1979, 2) be operative for the phenomena of concern to function. In other words, reconstructive science investigates the conditions or rules necessarily present to explain a phenomenon. From the pre theoretical deductions, theory is established and elaborated. Following the examination of Habermas in the preceding chapter, his theory of communicative action is premised on the formal pragmatics of expressing and defending validity claims in an effort to achieve mutual understanding. As argued, conditions which approximate formal pragmatics promote social learning and social change. Undesirable social consequences are explained in terms of phenomena which subvert formal pragmatics. Habermas identifies the illocutionary acts which constitute communicative action as the basis from which other kinds of social action such as “conflict, competition, strategic action in general” (1979, 1) are derived. Therefore the distinction between Habermas’ reconstructive approach and social science as it is typically conducted are the practical rules ascertained from concrete behaviour utilized as the first order of theory building. Pedersen (2008, 462) describes this first step as a process in which implicit knowledge is made explicit.

Complementary to the Habermasian theoretical frame for the analysis of Auroville described in Chapter Three (to be applied in Chapter Six), I adopted the central principle of Habermas’ reconstructive science for the purpose of analyzing the database



on Auroville development which forms the empirical component of my research. That is, I examined the database for its pre theoretical content. What are the rules and principles of organization expressed by the township through the content shared by its residents in its weekly news letters? More precisely, what is learned from the database itself. In this chapter, I describe the methodology adopted and developed for the dissertation work. A two part analysis has resulted. Database analysis constitutes Chapter Five: free coding of the database to work up the prevalent patterns which are then examined to discover the township's operative rules or principles, implicit knowledge made explicit. Chapter Six applies elements of Habermas' theory development to the database analysis. The elements are selected to enhance an understanding of development in Auroville and contribute to the process of specifying the theory of communicative action, as described in Chapter Three.

This chapter is organized into three parts: identification of the dissertation work in the context of a comprehensive programme of research beginning with my M.A. research; identification of the epistemology I've adopted to undertake the analysis of Auroville development 1975-2000, including further elaboration of reconstructive science as intended by Habermas, and; step by step description of the procedures developed to set up the database analysis.

#### **4.1 A Programme of Research on Auroville**

I have developed a program of sociological research around the development and functioning of Auroville. The first project in this program was my Master's thesis titled The International Township of Auroville, Tamil Nadu, India: The routinization of

charisma in a context of an inner-worldly mystical orientation (1993). In that project, we focused on a transition period in the township's growth from 1988 to 1991 and identified a form of individualism developing in Auroville distinct from possessive individualism. We identified this form of individualism with an ideal type Robertson (1978) developed from Weber's typology of two dimensions of orientation to salvation, inner-worldly and otherworldly, asceticism and mysticism. Aurovilians demonstrated evidence of an inner-worldly mystical orientation. Value-centered and experience-based, Aurovilians attempted "to live out an inwardly experienced reality" (Leard 1993, 111). With respect to their organization of the township, the residents of Auroville sought to achieve social action and consensus without employing conventional religious or bureaucratic forms of authority. We identified a network form of organization characterized by both unity and diversity. The dominant orientation in Auroville and the township's prevalent form of organization are complementary because both reflect acceptance of tension and change.

I developed an analysis by means of (1) the recording of community processes; (2) a thematic analysis of this content, and; (3) a theoretical treatment of the thematic analysis. Data collection involved 13 months of participant observation including note-taking in formal and informal settings, 22 one to three hour interviews with a sample of community members (varying on the basis of age, sex, nationality, locality, occupation and apparent disposition on different community conflicts), and collection, reading and reviewing of Auroville textual material relevant to the time period of study. I undertook the 13 months of participant observation during the 26 month period from October 1988 to December 1990.

At least two other studies on Auroville have since been completed. For his PhD dissertation (1993), David Joseph Lorenzo explored evidence of the rhetoric which surrounded the split in the 1970's between the residents of Auroville and the organization which had been the legal recipient of donations for the project, the Sri Aurobindo Society. Professor Lorenzo drew on concepts of symbolic capital, discourse community and consensus to examine the schism, its consequences, and the significance of social movements for an understanding of general agreement in a nation. Professor Robert N. Minor (1994) analyzed the available documentation relevant to the two stages of Auroville's nationalization by the Central Government of India (1980-82, 1988-1991), investigating Auroville as spiritual exponent of a religious population dominated by a secular state.

After completion of my Master's thesis and a year of university teaching, I returned to the International Township of Auroville to initiate and develop its Social Research Centre. For the purposes of the Auroville Economic Research Program (from 1998), I collected and organized documentation of Auroville's development from 1968 to the year 2000. Selecting from this material, I created and organized an electronic database composed primarily of socio-economic material from weekly internal newsletters (1975 – 2000). These newsletters are my source for (1) formal meeting notes from key political, economic, town-planning and environmental groupings in Auroville; (2) formal meeting notes from community-wide meetings and decision-making, and; (3) community member reaction to the issues that are raised. In my capacity as Director of Auroville's Social Research Centre, I was involved in the development and completion of three databases: financial, survey and textual. For the purpose of my PhD dissertation, I focus on the

computerized textual material, using the qualitative software program, NVivo. This program equipped me to organize on-screen the 58 megabytes of documentary material and electronically track the development of my analysis. Following the format of the methodology developed for my Master's thesis, I apply a generalizing theoretical analysis to the rational reconstruction of the database.

The database is an organization of 1,531 files in 343 folders and subfolders. Separate folders contain material from the Auroville Notes 1975 to 1982 (internal weekly newsletter), the Auroville Review 1977 to 1984 (a journal for external consumption), and the Auroville News 1983 to 2000 (internal weekly newsletter). Material is organized in subfolders according to the month of publication for each year. Therefore there are twelve subfolders for each year from 1975 to 2000 and for the newsletters up to five files for each month. Each article is indexed according to date, issue number and page number. Articles include local developments, meeting reports, events and news, plus commentary and discussion on the issues raised. We selected for uploading those contributions relevant to Auroville's growth and development. The database is a record of Auroville from an early stage that incorporates the controversies generated by those developments. From that early stage, when telephones were rare, to the year 2000, when Auroville residents were mostly plugged into computer systems and communication networks, the internal journal remained the key resource for discussion of the township's community issues. Separate folders in a year-by-year format contain community financial information published in the newsletters.

The data described above is organized under the folder "SRC – Processed", SRC standing for the Social Research Centre. This folder and "SRC- Collected" are subfolders

of Social Research Centre – Search. “SRC – Collected” contains files from the Auroville Archives computerized by the Auroville multi-media unit, Cynergy. For our database, I organized those files under subfolders identifying material relevant to economic organization, finance, surveys, and miscellaneous. Where Cynergy did not computerize relevant economic material from the archival finance and economy stacks, I made hardcopies of the documents. There are two subfolders distinct from material collected from Cynergy and the Auroville Archives. They involve material collected by the Social Research Centre: One subfolder includes the summaries of 12 interviews conducted for the Economic Research Programme. We selected individuals for the interviews who could give us insight into Auroville’s development from an early stage based on their own involvement. Another subfolder contains the summaries of 17 case studies of Auroville commercial and non-commercial units. These summaries are based on interviews of the current unit-holders. Unit is the term in Auroville which designates an organized ongoing activity, such as commercial units (products for export and/or the local market), service units, research units, and productive-informal units.

There are two root folders. I have described the organization of the root folder, **“Social Research Centre – Search”**. Companion to it is the root folder, **“Social Research Centre – Documents”**. Subfolders in this directory include documentation on Auroville land purchase from 1965 to the year 2000, documentation of the Auroville Board of Commerce Forum, year 1999, and recorded text with respect to Auroville by Mirra Alfasa, the Mother, the French-born woman who conceived of the International Township of Auroville and guided its development during its first five years. Database analysis for my dissertation involved coding most but not all of the weekly newsletters

from December 1975 to December 2000, with material from the Auroville Review to fill in information during the gap between the end of the Auroville Notes in 1982 and the commencement of the Auroville News in 1983.

I employed Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) to facilitate my analysis of such a large database. NVivo 7 is an advanced program of this type. Its data management capacities facilitated my efforts to develop a reconstructive analysis of the database. Using NVivo has the following benefits (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 812-819):

- Hypertext capability: swift movement between different parts of the database.
- Fast search and retrieval.
- Able to pull together related data quickly.
- Search results are displayed by scrolling so that the context of the search data is seen.
- Source tags: identification of database location of extracted material.
- Easy on-screen coding and revision.
- Able to apply several different codes to the same segment of text including higher-order codes.
- Display of coding and memoing.
- Free coding: able to represent nonhierarchical relationships.
- Analytic memos are connected to the data chunk.

I took up a grounded theory approach, developing hypotheses, or more precisely, recognizing relationships, from examination of the data itself as opposed to the hypothesis testing common to the positivist tradition. Consistent with the constant comparative method advanced by Glaser and Strauss (1967), I considered relationships generated in this grounded way against the ongoing scrutiny of the data (Fielding 1999, 100). This is consistent with Habermas' reconstructive method described above to the extent my concern is to uncover the rules and principles necessarily present for Auroville to unfold as a township the way that it does.

In the next section, I make Max Weber's principal concern with "meaning" an organizing principle to help locate my chosen epistemological orientation among the range of approaches available to me as qualitative researcher.

#### **4.2 Locating the Epistemology**

It is ironic that value-free research is attributed to Max Weber. He set in motion a school of research with a hermeneutic, or interpretive, epistemology. Rather than endorse the possibility of value free research, he claimed that we always imbue our activities with value. The discipline of a social researcher would be to attempt to make those values clear to oneself and to the audience of research in order that the impact on data collection and analysis would be minimized. Secondly, by means of his concept of "verstehen", he emphasized the importance of attempting to understand meaning from another's standpoint. As he sought to demonstrate in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1958), the way in which actors interpret situations is a significant factor in understanding the course of social development. Weber's hermeneutic epistemology assumes that a human being through his or her interpretive behavior generates meaning in relation to others within structures of human action. In this way, Weber initiated a hermeneutic tradition that did not entirely discount the structured relations posited by Karl Marx. Therefore, Weber was both interpretive and objectivist in his approach. Weber cleared the path to further methodological elaborations that focused on the generation of meaning by and between social agents.

Critical ethnography and oral history research are attempts to give voice to those that otherwise may not be heard: the powerless, the illiterate, or the forgotten. Feminist

oral history attempts to give interpretive authority to their subjects while at the same time applying a feminist critique of society. In this way, the dual approach of Weber is maintained, but with a difference. Silverman (2001, 87) would consider this to be an “emotionalist” epistemology: insight into an interviewee’s experience. The subject is considered to be an active participant in the construction of their experience. Feminist oral research itself is a strategy to further the feminist agenda of transforming the male dominated structures of society. Ironically then the concern for the authority of the subject is jeopardized by the co-opting of research material for political purpose. This constitutes the distinction from Max Weber’s hermeneutic and objectivist epistemology. In this way, the feminist approaches take up a pragmatist epistemology. They assume that the structural features of society may be changed through working to change discourse. Structures have no inherent value; they only reflect relations of advantage to some and disadvantage to most. Such assumptions are shared by proponents of critical and feminist ethnography. Critical ethnography, pragmatist in its roots, assumes relations of power in society that subvert opportunity for most. Relations of domination and exploitation prevail. Research of this nature has political purpose for social change. Reference to an external world which is objective is subsumed by action and discourse which is itself the source of meaning, having the purpose of structural change. Therefore, critical and feminist ethnography invoke a different epistemology from that of Weber. The objectivist element is instrumentalized. The hermeneutic approach of the Weberian social scientist is substituted by an activist role. The agency of participating social scientists seeks to produce substantive changes to the structures of social life.



A further step from Weber may be taken. A constructionist epistemology informs the social scientist that his or her relationship to the research subjects is a mutually constructed situation. Research focus may shift to “how” meaning is generated rather than the “why”. The “why” would invoke the objective, structural concerns of Weber or Marx, and indeed also for many feminists. In the ethnomethodological approach, concern for content is replaced by concern for how an encounter is accomplished. In this way, Weber’s original corrective of Marxian realist epistemology, his concern for human agency, entirely replaces macro structural concerns. Human agency is the emphasis of ethnomethodology. Rather than participants in society being viewed as subject to their social contexts, they are viewed as creators of their immediate local contexts.

Ethnomethodologists identify the microstructures of interaction. Such an absence of macro-structural concerns raises questions regarding the relevance of this approach. Pursuit of knowledge of such micro processes, without the political agendas which inform both Marxian and Feminist approaches, could be an avenue of research for those that have not yet conflated social science and politics.

The struggle in recent approaches to sociological research in which the critical epistemology seems to advocate rather than discourage the marriage of politics and research is to maintain balance between the two concerns. How to wed the potential of social science for social change with respect for science as rigorous methodological discipline? Habermas, a protagonist for the critical school itself, provides a formula with which to productively wed the two concerns by orienting political purpose to consensus-building, a concrete local accomplishment. Therefore political purpose becomes once

again oriented to the emancipation of people, rather than the ideological fulfillment of discursive elites.

Advocates of a positivist epistemology assume an objective world characterized by regularities, general laws which they endeavor to discover and test (Keat and Urry 1982, 4). To apprehend an objective world from this perspective involves appropriate methods to decrease the influence of the researcher and increase certainty that one is researching what one purports to be researching. In other words, research results may be true or false or somewhere in-between. Much effort is invested in increasing reliability, the possibility that other researchers undertaking the same methodology would meet with similar results, and increasing validity, the certainty that research variables and conclusions represent external reality.

More recent qualitative methods have substantially altered traditional methodological concerns with reliability and validity. These qualitative methods are those that place the active and deliberate subject at the center of the analysis. Instead of studying a world *ex post facto*, a world already complete, these approaches study the methods that subjects in this world take up to actively construct their social context. For example, recent forms of ethnography, textual analysis in particular, are not concerned with whether the research resources are true or false. A major concern for those undertaking more positivist approaches is how accurately these resources represent reality. Instead, the concern is with the social organization of the texts: “the processes through which texts depict reality” (Silverman 2001, 128). Analysis of texts is undertaken to reveal the practical decision-making involved in their output. It is not an objective reality, either diachronic or synchronic, which results. It is the identification of a process

engaged in by concrete decision-makers acting within specific constraints (Silverman 2001, 133).

Similarly, conversation analysis, which is based on Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, is concerned with "people's methods for producing orderly social interaction" (Silverman 2001, 167). Social actors are not subsumed by either major social events or categories of social structure such as class. They are subjects involved in particular social accomplishments. For this reason, conversation analysis involves a very high degree of detail in the documentation of its research resources.

Pragmatism maintains the concern with human agency that Weber emphasized in his debate with those who took up the legacy of Marx. The interpretive epistemology of Weber is located in Habermas's consensus theory of truth. This approach to truth is concerned with what works, what functions in actual life as truth. As such, it has the same emphasis that Weber had, that is, the concern for the meaning-generating agency of human subjects in social life. Similarly, the objectivist concern is maintained regarding the structures that social life generates, which both facilitate and constrain individual and collective agency.

Pragmatism is clearly differentiated from positivism. Peirce is attributed with the earliest form of pragmatism (Rockmore 2002, 47). He rejected the foundationalism of Descartes, which is constitutive of the positivist approach. Foundationalism assumes an external world independent of mind. Science from this perspective seeks to build a body of knowledge that is discovered independently of the diremptions of mind. Peirce constructed pragmatism in contradiction to Cartesian assumptions (Rockmore 2002, 49). In the collection, Habermas and Pragmatism, Rockmore outlines the core elements of the

pragmatist approach of Peirce. The features of pragmatism outlined are those that he finds common to pragmatists, including Habermas:

a concern with the practice as distinguished from the theory of knowledge; a disdain for absolute claims, such as apodicticity; a stress on future results, or consequences; a concern with a collaborative approach to knowledge, hence the abandonment of the monological approach to the cognitive subject; and an understanding of the subject as real, finite human beings. (Rockmore 2002, 49)

Core elements of pragmatism constitute critical and feminist ethnography and ethnomethodology, and inform other methodologies such as critical and feminist oral histories. These approaches respond to Weber's original concern that we always imbue our activities with value. Habermas makes that value consensus. The value is not in particular content but in the opportunity for each person to have a voice in his and her future, a concrete local accomplishment. Habermas is suggesting that moral prescription defer to morality. Epistemologically Weber and Habermas express a crucial difference in approach. Habermas' approach is not a value orientation in the sense that Weber understood it. Habermas is arguing that formal pragmatics presuppose language use, the media upon which we depend for subject formation, rationality and social organization. The freedom for a public to decide together on their shared norms and values then is not simply a potential "right" granted by an authority. Nor is truthfulness and sincerity a mere choice between different orientations to other people. These practices are intrinsic to human communication. The two examples correspond to what Habermas calls discourse ethics, formulated on the basis of the pragmatic presuppositions of language use and other elements of his formal pragmatics. Therefore the use of language has both creative and normative potential. Where Weber could not see a way out of the purposive rationality engulfing western civilization except by virtue of charismatic leadership,

which he could not predict, Habermas recognized in language use the potential for social learning and change as well as the mechanics of how human potential may be circumscribed (lifeworld colonization). The theory of communicative action expresses potential for learning and change in a line of argument unbroken from the dyadic posing and defending of validity claims through the theory of societal rationalization. Habermas recognizes how values may change, not only across populations and generations as Weber demonstrated, but among speakers in real time, consistent with his pragmatist assumptions. Habermas' theory constitutes an argument for "social learning." While maintaining the importance of Weber's concept of "verstehen" (Pedersen 208, 461) and building upon Weber's rationalization thesis, Habermas' "reconstructive science" is distinctly different from Weber's hermeneutical approach. Pedersen in the following quote identifies the distinction between a hermeneutical and a reconstructive approach:

The hermeneutic approach thus follows as a consequence of the object domain that is being investigated. But as opposed to hermeneutic approaches, which primarily deal with semantic structures that may be read, so to speak, from the surface structures of a language, rational reconstruction seeks to reveal deep structures, meaning a fundamental set of rules, such as the production of meaningful linguistic expressions. The aim is thus not a direct paraphrase or translation of an unclear meaning, but rather underlying rules and structures as conditions for any meaningful linguistic expression. (Pedersen 208, 462)

I took up the analysis of 25 years of computerized socio-economic documentation according to Habermas's reconstructive method (Alford 1985, 330-331). That is, the data is treated as a local accomplishment, the rules for which it is my task to discern. Rules of composition of the data are not my concern. Rather, my concern is the principles of organization in Auroville expressed by the text. In this case study, the rules (principles) are recognized by themes generated by examination of the data, a pre-theoretical correspondence to the data. Habermas is clear about the distinction between a

reconstructive method and nomological method. In reconstructive method, the data and the description are internally connected (Alford 1985, 333-334). In nomological method, data is subsumed by theory which pre-exists data collection. The former involves discovery, the latter involves attribution. Establishing the patterns evident in the data precedes and determines the theoretical treatment of the thematic material. This effort corresponds to Habermas' concern for the "hermeneutical circle", the minimizing of which is an explicit purpose of his reconstructive science (Pedersen 2008, 461).

There are parallels between my methodological approach to the Auroville database and Habermas' "methodical attitude" (Pedersen 2008, 482), by which term he refers to reconstructive science. Firstly, a concern for what is actually uttered (Pedersen 2008, 464). For Habermas, this involved an examination of speech acts. For this dissertation, I examined written contributions to the Auroville Notes/News. Secondly, "Habermas seeks to find the conditions for the possibility of reaching an agreement through communication" (Pedersen 2008, 464). I seek the principles of organization by which Auroville sustains its ambitious and anarchic ideal, and the consequences thereof for its development. Thirdly, we hold in common the practice of analyzing data prior to theoretical analysis: "...contrary to empirical analytical sciences, which seek to replace pre-theoretical knowledge with a more adequate scientific explanation, reconstructive sciences seek to understand and uncover the structures on which our pre-theoretical knowledge is built" (Pedersen 2008, 464). For the purpose of this dissertation then, I may claim that I adopt a pragmatist epistemology, approximate a rational reconstructive approach ("methodical attitude"), and therefore may legitimately seek to make specific

dimensions of my study a contribution to the efforts on the part of Habermas to establish “reconstructive science.”

Secondly, according to the Mother "Auroville wants to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities. The purpose of Auroville is to realise human unity.” The significance of the practical experimentation undertaken there is its utility for resolving problems endemic everywhere. The explicitly universal intention for Auroville corresponds to Habermas’ intention with regards to reconstructive science. From Pedersen (2008, 463):

These reconstructions harbor a wish for revealing a universal “know how” as well. It is not just a matter of uncovering features that are valid within a specific context limited in time and space, but rather the exposure of a species competence, a competence that is universally valid, and which at the level of formal-pragmatics must be understood as a precondition for the possibility of language altogether. That which is produced through reconstruction thus represents a parallel to general theories with regard to extent and status (Habermas 1979, 14).

A centre of research international in scope, the Auroville experiment itself is an object of study for reconstructive science seeking universal competences. Research on Auroville is fulfilling a function of Auroville.

Through their attempts to achieve mutual understanding, community practices are developed and particular forms of development achieved. My rationally reconstructive approach attempts to make explicit to the residents of Auroville the principles of development they have set in motion. ‘Reconstructions, says Habermas, "make an essentialist claim ... [I]f they are true, they have to correspond precisely to the rules that are operatively effective in the object domain - that is, to the rules that actually determine the production of surface structures"' (Alford, 1985, 331). Therefore the results of my

study must be able not only to survive the discourse that its completion will evoke in Auroville, but serve as an effective contribution to the ongoing discourse on developmental issues. According to Habermas, reconstructions are validated in discourse (Alford 1985, 330).

### **4.3 Database Development**

As previously described in Section 4.1, the textual database upon which this study is based was developed as one of three databases (survey, financial and textual) for the Auroville Economic Research Programme. As Director of the Auroville International Township Social Research Centre, I was involved in the development of all three databases with Professor Hendrik Thomas, Senior Professor of Economics and Labour Studies at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, the Netherlands. For the textual database, I collected the resources, co designed the database, hired and trained the research assistants for its compilation, and supervised its uploading into electronic files. We took the broadest possible view for selection of data from the Auroville Notes/Review/News, only eliminating notifications by units or individuals that bore no relevance to the township's development, such as changes in working hours, performances to be held, etc. Given the volume of the data collected as described in Section 4.1, I circumscribed the data to be coded for the purpose of this dissertation to the selections extracted from the Auroville Notes/News. More than 1,000 files from 25 years of weekly newsletters amount to over 7000 pages of single spaced text. In Appendix A, I describe the method I developed using the qualitative software NVivo to code the database for analysis.



This chapter and its appendix provided further background to this dissertation project, including an examination of the basic epistemological assumptions, methodological orientation and rudimentary methods with which I undertook the database development and coding. Chapter Five further elaborates the methodological dimension and the methods adopted by providing the step by step results of my grounded approach to database analysis.

Habermas' reconstructive approach involved a transcendental stage in which he reasoned "from" concrete local accomplishments the factors that must be present to achieve mutual understanding. His reasoning was informed by literature related to this concern. He advocates empirical investigation to test the theory based on these factors. Having implemented the three phases of an inductive approach characteristic of grounded theory, I am taking an empirical approach to the reconstruction of the factors of Auroville development while claiming to make a contribution to reconstructive science. In addition to adopting the methodical approach characteristic of the practice of reconstructive science, there is another potential contribution based upon the database analysis (Chapter Five). Residents adopted with their independence in 1975 the discourse ethics Habermas elaborated based upon his theory of communicative competence. Their experiments in political and economic organization hold to discourse ethics as the fundamental principles Habermas seeks to demonstrate they are. This adherence is demonstrated by the database and is the basis for a further reconstructive element to my research. In a two stage format demonstrated in Chapters Five and Six, empirical and theoretical, respectively, the dissertation identifies principles of development associated with the adoption of communicative action. Illocutionary acts, action directed toward mutual

understanding, form the basis of the theory of communicative action and political organization in Auroville. My research question is: What are the consequences for development of adhering to these propositions? Consistent with reconstructive science as Habermas understands and expresses it, my research question has been derived from undertaking the research rather than driving it. To reiterate, the reconstructive dimensions involve (1) the “methodical attitude” taken up to develop an analysis of the database, demonstrated in Chapter Five, and; (2) application of elements of Habermas’ theory of communicative action to the database in Chapter Six, which amounts to an examination of his own premises, and extends these premises to the consequences of their application to social organization.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DATABASE ANALYSIS**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the results of the methodical approach undertaken to organize and analyze the database of Auroville Reviews 1975-2000. It is a grounded approach to theory development in which the ongoing collection of data, in this case the movement through the years of Auroville newsletters, generates recognition of the mechanics of Auroville development, factors which residents live but do not express or explain to each other. These factors are parallel in explanatory power to the rules of discourse that Habermas adopts for his reconstructive approach to discourse. Hence I'm trying to follow Habermas' method to make what is implicit in Auroville with regard to its development explicit. The reconstructive approach he first applied to dyadic communication, I'm attempting on the level of social organization when that organization has itself adopted the rules of discourse. Hence I'm at the same time (1) attempting to apply his methodical attitude; (2) reconstruct the principles of organization of Auroville; and (3) analyze the consequences for development of adoption of his formulation of discourse ethics. Chapter Five treats (1) and (2); Chapter Six: (3).

Instead of the typical grounded approach by means of which theory would result, this chapter serves as the legitimation for my particular application of select ideas of Habermas' theory of communicative action in Chapter Six. In effect, I'm attempting to apply Habermas' methodical approach, dimensions of his reconstructive science, to serve as the foundation for the application of his theory to the case of the International Township of Auroville. In Chapter Five, I take as a general frame the development of

Auroville's political subsystem from the phase of the township's practical independence from the Sri Aurobindo Society in Pondicherry from December 1975 to the development of the political subsystem operating by July 1994. By this time, Auroville's internal organization had integrated the impacts of activation in 1991 of the Auroville Foundation Act. The organization persisted in this form, with variations, through the year 2000. While the database is composed of contributions to the Auroville Notes / News by residents of Auroville (1034 files varying in length from 0.5 to 22 single-spaced pages of transcribed text, of which approximately 657 files are manually coded), the length, breadth and depth of this content is a priori one fundamental limitation of the analyses presented in this and the next chapter.

### **5.1 From Data through Coding to Themes**

In 1973, the SAS informed the residents of Auroville that the SAS could no longer finance the food requirements of the residents. From this point, internal economic organization began to develop to meet the daily needs of the residents. Internal food growing intensified. Secondly, development of commercial units along the lines of individual Aurovilians organizing villagers for the production of handicrafts for external sale expanded. This was particularly true of Lisa's (the Netherlands) development of the unit, Aurocreation. Early internal organization of the distribution of food grown in Auroville and purchased from the market in Pondicherry commenced with "Pour Tous", meaning "For All".

As outlined in Chapter Two, events of 1975 culminated in most residents of Auroville agreeing to disassociate the experiment of Auroville from the Sri Aurobindo

Society. In their minds, they were ensuring the integrity of the experiment by drawing decision-making to the township and away from the claim of the SAS that in the absence of the Mother, Auroville was their project to be managed from Pondicherry by them.

The political and economic development of Auroville from this point in time onwards expresses the tension between following the Mother's comments with regards to her vision of Auroville, and her direction that the development of Auroville was solely in the hands of those that chose to live there, which makes her comments subject to interpretation by each member of the community. The decision to break with the SAS emerged from open community-wide meetings. By the commencement of the Auroville Notes in December 1975, the starting point of the resource for this analysis, these meetings were weekly and called "Pour Tous Meetings". By different names and scheduling, ultimately enshrined in the Auroville Foundation Act 1988, the institution of open, face to face decision-making persisted through the year 2000 as the ultimate forum for decision-making in the township despite the fact that the population had grown from approximately 300 in 1975 to 1544, including newcomers, in 2000. (The population in 2010 was approximately 2300) Residents retained their decision-making with respect to their communities and their field of work while all decisions pertaining to the organization of the township were discussed and resolved in this forum, including acceptance of new members. Those wishing to join the township would present themselves to the meeting.

For the remainder of the 1970's, residents accepted the implementation of elementary system formation. On the political level, Pour Tous meetings instituted in 1978 the "Auroville Cooperative", a body of 12 residents who would act as an executive.

The same year, residents working in production and sales initiated Artisana Trust as an umbrella organization for their varied activities. In November 1978, the Envelope System was instituted as a separate meeting to make decisions on the disbursement of funds for the township. Each community of Auroville (23 in 1977) and area of work such as education, green work and services had an Envelope representative who committed to attend. These meetings were also open to everyone in the community.

The "Envelopes", Auroville's internal financial organization, emerged in November 1978 in an attempt to further clarify the use and distribution of money in Auroville. In particular, there was a need to see the community's basic needs and priorities more completely so that Auroville might live within its means and no longer borrow money in order to function. "Envelopes", or categories, were established for already existing work areas or projects in the community: the Food Cooperative, Matrimandir, Greenwork, Community Maintenance, and many others. (Legrand 1980)

The envelope system was viewed as a means to redress the problems which had emerged with the establishment of the "Pour Tous Fund" in 1976. From August 1975, no more resources were channelled to Auroville via the SAS. Without sufficient internal and external funding, the Pour Tous Fund was prone to borrowing from month to month to meet collective needs. The envelope system was meant to eliminate the borrowing while also generating clarity and knowledge about how the internal economy worked, where the greatest needs were, while maintaining individual choice regarding participation in the system. Residents, commercial and non-commercial units, Auroville Centres abroad and other outside donors could target their funding to the following envelopes: Food Cooperative, Milk Cooperative, Cash Food, Market, Food Investment, Community Maintenance, Services, Children, Greenwork, Matrimandir, Personal, and Unspecified (Legrand 1980). The latter was a resource to fill the requirements of the

other envelopes at the regular envelope meetings. In its development from November 1978 to March 1984, the target envelopes were adapted several times according to need.

My first attempt at axial coding involved developing tree nodes according to the proposition in my research proposal which counter posed consensus-building and power, as if they were antithetical to each other.

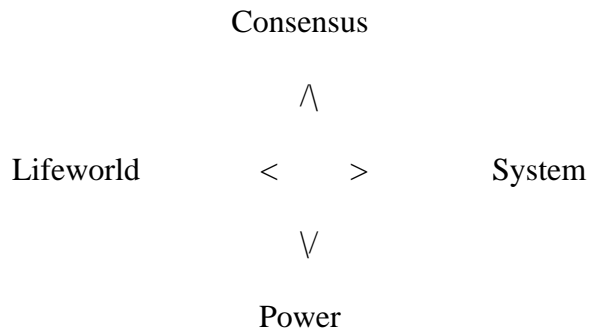


Figure 5.1. Consensus – Power; Lifeworld – System Dichotomies.

Figure 5.2 identifies the headings formulated in NVivo for an attempt to organize data according to this conceptualization.

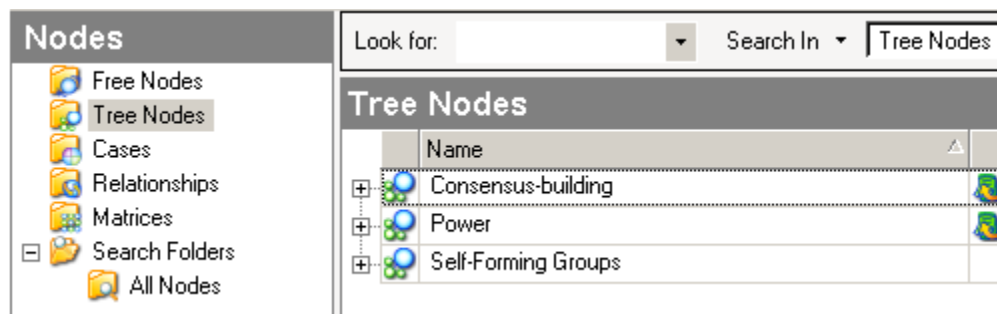


Figure 5.2. Tree Nodes – Headings.

Figure 5.3 opens the tree identifying organizations that emerged through agreement in the Pour Tous meetings between December 1975 and 1980.

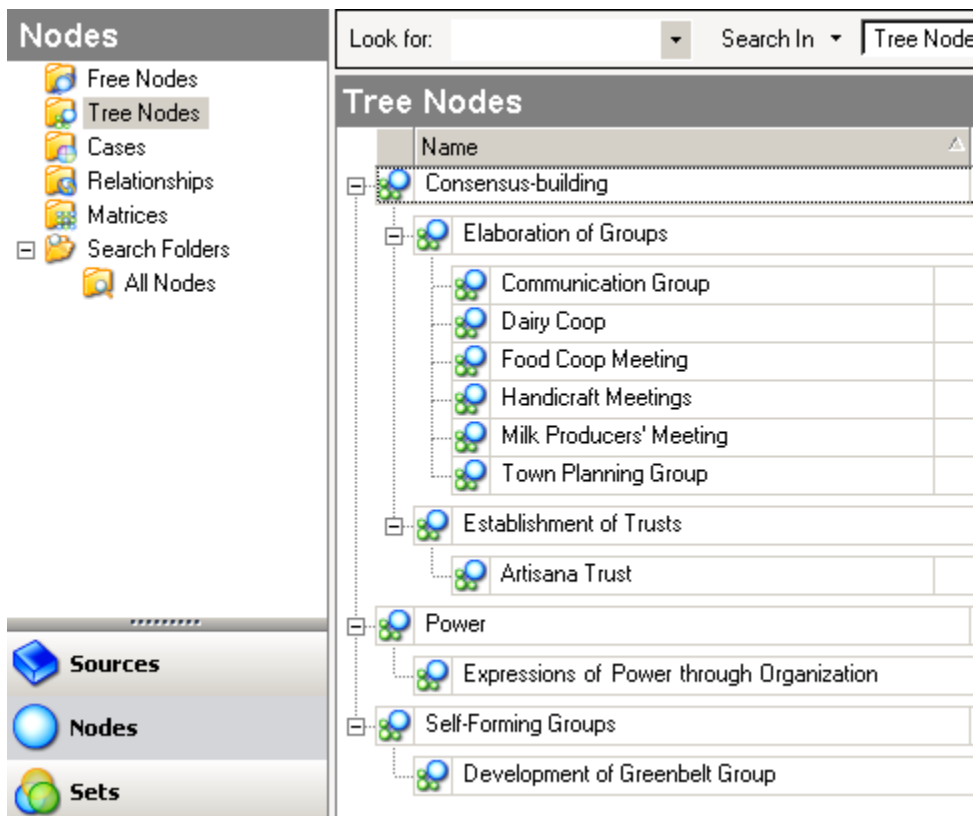


Figure 5.3 Tree Nodes – Open.

Originally this attempt at axial coding appeared useful in differentiating the different ways organizations arose in Auroville, but very little data supported power as a category antithetical to consensus building. By coding into the 1980's, I found identifying the source of new organizations was often not clear. Following the Notes, the Food Coop appeared to have been sanctioned by the Pour Tous meeting. An article in the Auroville Review 1982 which provided a lengthy retrospective on the development of the Food Coop clearly stated its initiation from the food producers themselves. The lack of clarity on origins meant I could not take this set of tree nodes further. Therefore, I returned to free coding.

In an attempt to settle the dispute between the Sri Aurobindo Society and the residents of Auroville, the Central Government of India enacted the Auroville Act in



1980. All assets of Auroville were placed temporarily in the hands of the government to be transferred in a limited time of five years to Auroville. It was the responsibility of the residents of Auroville to develop and formalize an organization to which all assets would be legally transferred. Appealing to the constitution of India which protects religions from interference from government, the SAS lodged an injunction against the enactment of the Auroville Act claiming Auroville was a religion. In a 1982 decision with the residents of Auroville impleading on the side of the Government of India, the SAS lost its bid for control of Auroville. The Supreme Court of India decided that Auroville did not constitute, by intention or in practice, a religion.

Further forms of system-building emerged in the early 1980's with the institution by 1982 of the Entry Group. This group had the mandate to accept new residents, "newcomers", and facilitate their integration. An umbrella organization for all educational endeavors in Auroville called the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIER) commenced in February 1984. Substantial government funding supported the projects of this organization by annual grant. For those working for educational projects, personal maintenance was now drawn from this funding.

From 1983/84 the collective economy broke down because shortfalls to the envelope system became severe and protracted. Internal and external resources were not sufficient to meet the budgets. Organizations such as food distribution, farms and services moved to a cash basis. The Food and Maintenance Group replaced the envelope system. This group continued to maintain efforts towards collective organization. At the same time, the Auroville Cooperative split into two new groups, an Executive Council to address external issues, and the Coordination Group for internal issues. While finance

was withdrawn to individuals, enterprises and organizations, a Financial Group in 1985 and then a Financial Service in 1987 were established to facilitate the exchanges. These changes were decided in the general meetings which at this time were called “Monitoring Body” meetings. The period of economic de-centralization endured from 1983 to 1989 when a series of economic seminars, study group formation, general meetings, and individual consultations again brought to the fore financial coordination on a collective level with the Financial Service central to this new organization.

During the period of decentralized economy, many components of the pattern of decision-making which have endured through the year 2000 were tested, fine tuned and adopted long term.

The second attempt at axial coding resulted in the set of 31 nodes, a process described in Appendix A (coding text from November 1983 to May 1987). Implemented with further adjustments as the coding frame for the text from May 1987 to July 1994, the set of 31 nodes represent a scheme of what may be learned from the database. See Table 5.1 in Appendix B. They immediately bring to attention relationships between certain nodes, and ways of interpreting the database which theretofore were not recognizable. As noted in Appendix A, evidence related to system formation predominates.

The power node was poorly populated. The database corresponds fruitfully to the nodes which pertain to either consensus or system-building. Hence the original effort at tree nodes counter posing consensus-building and power is surpassed for a configuration which involves consensus-building and systemization. Such recognition based on the formulation of the axial codes culminating in Table 5.1 constitutes the second level of analysis. The third level of analysis is recognition of themes, or specifically in the case of

this study, principles of organization operating in Auroville across time. Theme VI is the recognition that over time the relationship between consensus-building and the systemization of power is characterized by a relationship of consensus-building and system-building responsive to people's aspirations, while not imposing a structure beyond the reach of anyone. The relationship I describe between the second and third levels of analysis also exemplifies one utility of a grounded research approach, that is, the repeated attempts at refinement of the abstract thinking, theory-building, in relation to the data collection (in my case, the coding of data already collected). The distinction between the first item on Table 5.1, principles coded under the node "Operating Principles", and themes is who attributes them. Principles expressed by residents of Auroville have been noted under the node while I as researcher am impugning the themes as observer of events across time.

In the summer-autumn of 2010, I undertook what is described in Appendix A as part of what constitutes the third stage in a grounded approach to coding data. Selective coding includes the selection of data chunks to be used as representative excerpts to exemplify the themes in the final written report. I examined the database from the period 9309 to 9407 (September 1993 to July 1994), Auroville News issues #505 to #544 inclusive. I used this process to ensure that each theme was recognizable not only across time in Auroville but also specific to particular situations.

In order to exemplify Theme VI, I draw the following excerpt from a Residents' Assembly meeting held on December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1993:

The last topic of the meeting was Internal Organization. When the topic was announced about ten people left the room, so the discussion was conducted by around thirty people. Janet gave an introduction stressing the view that Auroville needs a strong central organization at this stage of its development if it is to avoid being managed by outsiders.

Others see the problems differently, suggesting that existing forms, like the working groups, need to be strengthened and coordinated, not superseded. There is not a clear feeling about self-management. Our experience shows us that management in Auroville depends on good will and aspiration and that authoritative forms don't work. Some feel that if the working groups were able to formulate clear guidelines that had the mandate of the community that we wouldn't need an elaborate management structure. An example was given of the kibbutz community in Israel where 3 people manage the work for 3000 others. This is possible because all the members of the community strictly adhere to the mutually agreed upon guidelines. Obviously this is not the case yet in Auroville...

Extract 5.1. Theme VI - Residents' Assembly meeting December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1993 Issue #518.

Secondly, I refer to an extract from the Representatives' Group Meeting of the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 1994. In response to questioning on the part of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, one purpose of the meeting is to formulate what is the nature of organization in Auroville: (The term "amities" in article 3 is French for "friendships".)

#### **4 Characteristics**

1. Our organisation is open to all to see, to criticize, to participate.
2. There is flexibility, no crystallised structure. We answer to needs.
3. We are amities. Despite the amazing diversity of skills and professionalism we consider us to be in a continuous learning process.
4. We do not impose our vision and insights on practical or spiritual matters upon each other. Each of us places himself before his motives of participation in Auroville. There is trust in self-authority.

Extract 5.2. Theme VI – Representatives Group meeting February 14<sup>th</sup> 1994 Issue #525.

Table 5.1 indicates that the two most populated nodes are economic subsystem formation and political subsystem formation. They frequently code together. Secondly, I noted that coding economic subsystem breakdown also frequently corresponded with the coding of political subsystem formation and consensus formation. These observations gave rise to the formulation of the table below:

Table 5.2. Crisis – Engagement in Auroville

|        |      | Engagement |      |
|--------|------|------------|------|
|        |      | Low        | High |
| Crisis | Low  | X          |      |
|        | High |            | X    |

The coincidence of economic subsystem formation and economic subsystem breakdown with political subsystem formation correspond to explicit and operating principles of organization (1) no private property; (2) collective organization, and (3) consensus decision-making, noted under the node Operating Principles and in notes. The collective organization of the economy constitutes a major form of crisis in Auroville from the challenge of independent organization in 1976 to the breakdown of the Pour Tous Fund system by 1978, the breakdown of the envelope system in 1983/84 and the dramatic shortfalls in funding even with minimal collective expectations in the economy in 1986. With a stable system of centralized accounting agreed by the residents in 1989, established by the Economy Group and undertaken by the Financial Service, the crises in funding thereafter were anticipated and communicated by an overseeing organization offering possible solutions along with notification of the financial shortfalls. In one way, the ongoing weakness in funding for the collective economy marks a long term weakness in political organization. A reliable economic system had not yet been established. On the other hand, the axial coding (second level of analysis) tabulated as frequencies in Table

5.1 offers another perspective. Collective organization of the economy is very challenging. Repeated attempts to address economic shortfalls and breakdowns are major forms of crisis in the township giving rise to regular surges in political participation. This set of observations alert me to further dimensions of the third level of analysis. Economic subsystem formation is a significant source of participation in and maintenance of consensus decision-making. Theme II pertains to the dynamics of decision-making generated in Auroville based on its adoption of the ideal of no private property: the control of assets remains communicative. Because all moveable and immoveable assets of Auroville are held in trust by the community, all dimensions of the economy are addressed by the residents. Because the township had adopted from 1976 the ideal of decision-making both collective and consensual, the communicative practices are illocutionary.

Despite the delay caused by the Supreme Court challenge to the Auroville Act 1980, the Government of India continued to expect the formulation of a constitution from Auroville to which it could hand legal ownership of all the land and assets appropriated from the Sri Aurobindo Society. The pace at which residents arrived at a community consensus on a legal constitution for Auroville is a significant example of consequences arising from the collective choice for consensus decision-making. The Government of India in New Delhi allowed extensions to the original five year period from 1985 to 1988. In this time, from three broad choices including many variations, Aurovilians agreed to the establishment of a government foundation. All the other variations, it is reported, would have meant ownership in part reverting back to the SAS necessitating cooperation between the residents and the SAS on a new formula. A significant proportion of the

residents continued to believe that the SAS constituted a threat to the ideals the residents had established. The benign nature of government participation in Auroville since 1982 was a further argument in favour of the option chosen. In September 1988, the Parliament of India passed the Auroville Foundation Act. The articles of this Act were formulated in New Delhi.

A singular figure in the formulation of the Auroville Foundation Act was Dr. Kireet Joshi. His background included the appointment by the Mother as principal of the Mother's International School in Pondicherry at which he served for many years until his appointment by the government of Indira Gandhi in the 1970's as Special Secretary to the Ministry of Education in New Delhi. He had played a principle role when in New Delhi in the foundation and central government financing of Auroville's educational unit established in 1984, the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research. The institute emerged at a time when Auroville's collective financial organization, the envelope system, was breaking down because of insufficient resources. His role in the formulation of the Foundation Act was definitive.

In the run up to the passing of the Act in parliament, an Auroville five member Task Force acted on behalf of the interests of the residents in New Delhi. The Act of Parliament brought a measure of closure to long simmering anxieties about the reach of the SAS into Auroville affairs. Returning to Auroville, members of the Task Force argued in community wide meetings for residents to pull together in support of the Foundation citing tremendous government good will. The Auroville Foundation Act constituted Auroville as an Autonomous Body of the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The township as an experiment in Human Unity including recognition of

its original Charter now had a formal legal status beyond the ownership claim of the SAS. Consistent with the Auroville ethic of open community wide face-to-face decision-making, day to day decision-making now lay constitutionally with the Residents Assembly. The following diagram provides a view of the overall structure of the Auroville Foundation:

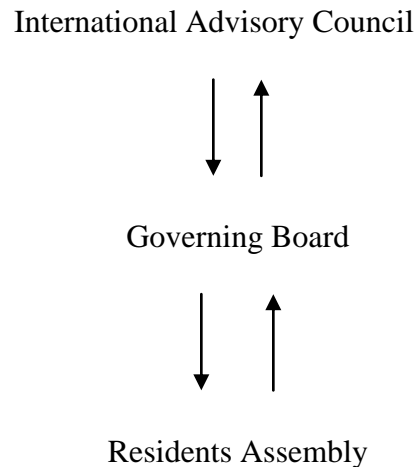


Figure 5.4. Structure of Auroville Foundation.

The Residents Assembly is constituted of every adult resident accepted onto the Master List of residents. The Foundation Act leaves it up to the residents to decide the practices which constitute a formal decision. The Residents Assembly is responsible to the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation (GB), a body of 12 prominent members of Indian society including a prescribed number of members drawn from the Indian government. The Government of India appoints the chairperson of this committee and two functionaries drawn from the Indian civil service to work and reside in Auroville on behalf of the Governing Board: the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation and the Finance Officer. The International Advisory Council is constituted of five prominent citizens of nations other than India. Its role is to ensure and expand the international character of the Auroville experiment as well as to ensure that the Foundation operates



consistently with regards to the ideals of Auroville. Members of these bodies meet annually in Auroville to address current issues. It was incumbent upon Auroville to strike up two management committees in Auroville, one pertaining to the management of assets and the other to oversee financial management. Residents chose to combine the two required committees into one, the Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC).

The period between the passage of the Auroville Foundation Act in September 1988 and its activation in January 1991 was the period I analyzed in detail for my M. A. thesis. With respect to political subsystem formation, there are recognizable phases from 1975 to 2000. The first three years of independent organization, 1975 to 1978, were characterized by collective decision-making mediated mainly by the general meeting; 1978 to 1984, elementary political subsystem formation; 1984 to 1988, a decentralizing of decision-making to commercial units, work groups and individuals while collective decision-making was maintained through the general meetings and the executive bodies. From September 1988 to January 1991, there were intensive efforts to renew the collective character of the Auroville economy. This period drew together previous practices of preparation for, facilitating and undertaking general meetings including an Auroville wide survey. Seminars on key issues of concern became a regular feature, plus focused meetings by interest groups, such as the group representing all services in the township. The Economy Task Group in this phase conducted consultations with individual residents and unit holders. The phase which followed, 1991 to 1994, is a shift from intensive activity in anticipation of the activation of the Foundation to a period in which residents of Auroville and the designated officials of the Foundation set in motion the negotiations and compromises necessary for Auroville to function in the context of

the Foundation. The resulting organization formed a stable political and economic basis in the last phase of 1994 to 2000 for further experimentation in collective organization and efforts for collective mobilization to meet ongoing financial crises in a way which corresponded to an ideal of collective economy the nature of which remained a matter of trial and error and ongoing debate. Efforts to achieve autonomous consensual decision-making and an economy which both engages and supports every member of the township continued in the context of Foundation officials who appeared to want to help Auroville by managing it themselves under the authority of the articles of the Foundation Act. The interpretation of the Act shared by Task Force in 1988 was surpassed by its legalistic implementation which for many Aurovilians appeared to threaten the principle of no ownership. The phases are not highly defined because consensus formation in the general meetings (different names over time), and from 1978, an executive which mediates issues in the township, are common to the different phases. Figure 5.4 below provides an outline of the political organization achieved by 1994:

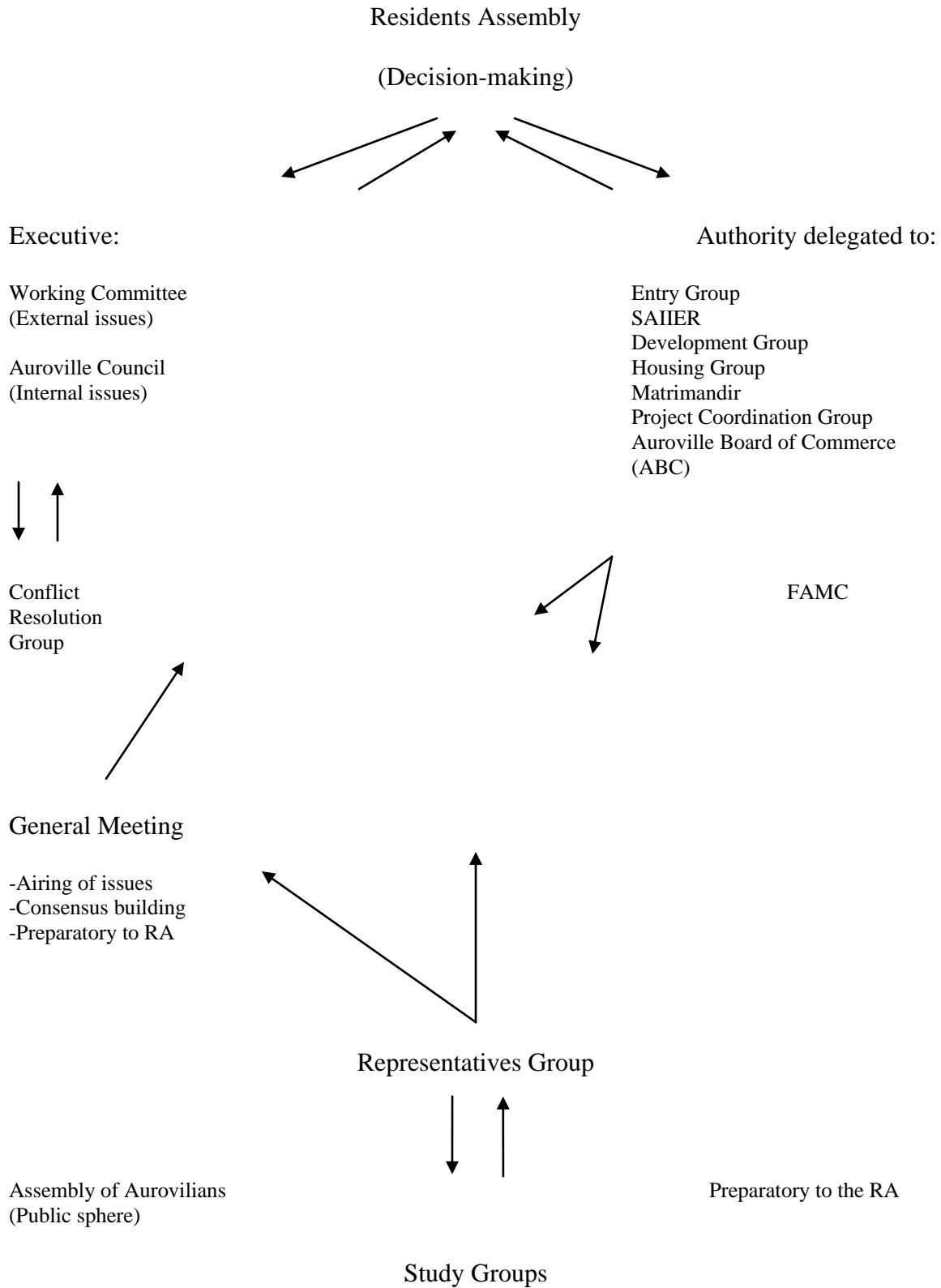


Figure 5.5. Auroville Internal Organization / Cycle of Decision-making 1994.

In order to make decision-making more effective, residents struck a Representatives Group composed of individuals involved in different sectors of Auroville life, including services, commercial units, Council, Working Committee, town planning, development, education, village action, art and culture, farms, dairy and forestry. In every case, working groups operate within these arenas of activity. Issues brought to the attention of the Auroville Council, the Working Committee, or raised in a Residents Assembly meeting or General Meeting may be referred to the Representatives Group. Their role is to bring the discussion to a point of development where enough information and consideration may allow for a decision in a Residents Assembly meeting. In each of these forums a study group may be struck to examine an issue in detail. The study groups share their reports which the Representatives Group uses to fuel their discussions. Issues are aired in general meetings which do not serve to make decisions. If the issue allows sufficient time an issue will move back from the Study Group to the Representatives Group to the General Meeting to the Residents Assembly for decision-making. This cycle may not be successful in achieving consensus in the RA and will have to return to other bodies for further discussion, debate, and information gathering. One such issue was the suggestion on the part of the Working Committee regarding composition of a Conflict Resolution Group. Part of the process is identified in the extract below from a Representatives Group meeting of December 6<sup>th</sup> 1993:

#### **REPS GROUP MEETING 06.12.93**

**Present** : Alain, Ashok Chatterjee, Aster, Bhaga, Bhavana, Claudine, Ed, Francoise, Frederick, Guy, Gillian, Juanita, Luigi, Mary, Nicole, Paul Vincent, Pala, Patrick (Sincerity), Prem, Santo, Thomas, Tapas (Notes), Vardharajan.

## **Proposed Agenda**

WC Report on Conflict Resolution Group  
Maintenance of Aurovilians  
Rules and Regulations  
Office Order No. 5

### **Topic 1: Conflict Resolution Group**

The WC came up with a suggestion that a list of 30 people should be constituted and two coordinators to keep up continuity. A long discussion followed. The main focus was: how to implement a decision taken? Whom to address if an issue arises and on the basis of which guidelines should this group act? Many people agreed that conflicts should be resolved since Auroville is very much about conflict resolutions. It was felt that the WC should be given the green light to carry on this work; come up with two names of coordinators and 30 names out of which (people could be selected either from within the group or from outside), as and when conflicts arise. This allows a certain flexibility within the group. Simultaneously, the Reps Group will review and reformulate the general guidelines with various working groups, which may become a reference point for the whole community.

Extract 5.3. Representatives Group meeting on Working Committee suggestion regarding composition of Conflict Resolution Group December 6<sup>th</sup> 1993 Issue #515.

Extract 5.3 identifies the level of consultation arising from what in the Auroville context is a relatively uncontroversial issue. Each element of the organization depicted in Figure 5.4 need be considered a part of a network of communication between work groups rather than a hierarchy, or chain of command. It is the Residents Assembly in which ultimate decision-making resides, a meeting called for the whole of the Auroville population to decide on a particular issue or set of issues. The format agreed for conflict resolution for this phase of organizational development involved contacting the Auroville Council with an issue that need be resolved between two or more individuals, two or more communities or between an individual and the rest of their community. The Auroville Council would contact people who had volunteered their names as facilitators for conflict resolution. The standard was that two facilitators who felt they would be able

to help would meet those involved in private meetings until a resolution was found. Membership in Auroville groups, including those listed in Figure 5.4, are undertaken on top of one's field of work and participation in maintaining and developing the community in which one lives. It is therefore a third level of participation in the township. The Assembly of Aurovilians listed on the bottom left corner of Figure 5.4 is an example of public sphere. These are further opportunities to meet and discuss issues outside of the formally established organizational network depicted in Figure 5.4.

Theme III pertains to the persistent renewal of economic organization / planning, which again identifies the principle role of illocutionary action in the Auroville economy: the economy is based on illocutionary participation instead of the public following preset formulae setting particular tasks to specific levels of remuneration. The following extract is drawn from the meeting notes of the Funds and Assets Management Committee December 1993. The FAMC is a body corporate of the Auroville Foundation Act 1988. To the authors of the Foundation Act, it appeared appropriate to constitute decision-making bodies with the responsibility to make decisions pertaining directly to finance and asset management. It is body of 12 members constituted of residents of Auroville and the two Indian Administrative Service personnel assigned to the Auroville Foundation, the Secretary and the Finance Officer. To Aurovilians, finance and asset management falls within the purview of their network of consensual decision-making. Finding that they could not constitutionally resist the formation of a body responsible for all assets of Auroville and setting policy for their management, the residents of Auroville constituted the body to operate as part of the network of Auroville working groups, as demonstrated also in this extract:

## **Meetings with commercial units**

Since 21st October regular meetings have been held between the FAMC, commercial unit holders, the Economy Task Group, members from the Development Group and, lately, representatives from the Matrimandir Coordination Group to look into the various maintenance and development needs of the community, and to arrive at a common policy for the utilisation of community funds.

These meetings have been very helpful in expressing many – often conflicting – points of view, in airing pent-up feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction, and in building an atmosphere of trust and goodwill among all present.

Several topics have been discussed at these meetings such as audit of commercial unit accounts, income tax situation, profit contributions from commercial units, Central Fund budgets, housing development, Matrimandir's financial needs etc. So far, no commonly accepted conclusions have been arrived at, no policies have been agreed upon, and no "binding" decisions have been taken. However, more important than these practical results, is the general feeling that, through this process of a frank and open dialogue, a "proper" environment is created to explore one of the most difficult and touchy issues: money!

We hope that these meetings will lead to a more comprehensive view on Auroville's financial needs, and a more collective decision making process on the utilisation and allocation of community funds in the future. We will inform the community more in detail later.

Extract 5.4. FAMC report December 1993 Issue # 514.

Theme I pertains to the drive in Auroville for organization based on the principles of dyadic communication: Aurovilians seek a direct link in organization between individual mentality and social structure, as evidenced by the following extract from the Working Committee Report of the 28<sup>th</sup> of April 1994:

Frederick came to tap us lightly on our group shoulder and remind us that we are getting too bureaucratic – that, for instance, our letters occasionally do not carry anything of our personalities (the language of the technocraft [sic]), and that we should really try to instill the Auroville spirit into every letter we send out.

Extract 5.5. Frederick and the Working Committee April 1994 Issue #536.

The modeling of dyadic communication for social organization in Auroville apparent in Theme I is also apparent in Theme IV: the power of personal self-expression versus power over others as distortion of the former. Illocutionary communication, communication oriented to reaching mutual understanding, is the standard in Auroville, while other forms of communication are viewed as a distortion, paralleling Habermas' theoretical stand that perlocutionary, or strategic, forms of communication are derivative of illocutionary forms of communication.

In the following extract from a Representatives Group's meeting January 31<sup>st</sup> 1994, members of the Working Committee update members of the Representatives Group regarding the upcoming visits by the International Advisory Council (IAC) and the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation (GB):

Maybe a meeting with the Representatives Group could be arranged. It was emphasized that in any case we shouldn't bring in "political" overtones, and count rather on the deeper, more genuine and spontaneous concern that could naturally arise in both IAC and GB members through the informal contacts with all of us in the previous days, for ensuring a favorable response on their part to the various requests we have to present to them, not as "bosses", but as influential people who are willing to support Auroville, and collaborate with us, within their own sphere of action, for the realisation of "Mother's Dream".

Extract 5.6. Representatives Group Meeting January 31<sup>st</sup> 1994 Issue #523.

Theme VII counter poses substance and semantics, relationships versus strategic action. Principles are not invented for strategic gains. Rather, the emergence of principles remains dialogical, communicative, and circumspect, a la Derrida discussed in Chapter Three. Rather than Auroville being a context where certain principles are imposed, the principle is one of deciding together, identifying once again the pre-eminence of the goal of reaching mutual understanding, and specifically Habermas' principle of discourse ethics (D). The relationships are the principle concern. The following extract is drawn



from a Representatives Group Meeting in January 1994 in which a set of guidelines proposed by the Housing Group was discussed:

We discussed Guidelines for Guidelines (Really!). It was felt that many of the Guidelines being presented are too dry with a bureaucratic formulation swallowing the Light and Human Heartedness. It was felt that a history and background should be woven into the “Guidelines” to show how they came about and why they exist in their present form (for now!)

Extract 5.7. Representative Group Meeting on Housing Group guidelines proposal January 1994 Issue #521.

Theme VII relates to the observations that led to the recognition of Theme II. The crises that evoke greater engagement in public decision-making in Auroville do so because the economy is a collective responsibility. While I note the correspondence between crisis and engagement, Pedersen, following Habermas, notes that facing crisis is also an opportunity for learning:

A situation of crisis is generated that forces the normative structures to handle the situation and this can only be done through moving to a higher level of learning. (Pedersen 2008, 477-478)

Similar to Theme II, Theme VII identifies that every step is negotiated through actual relationships rather than the imposition of ideas (and as we shall see in Chapter Six, mediated exclusively neither by money or power).

Theme V notes the interest in substantive versus formal unity. Unity based on complementary functionality is not enough. Residents seek a unity which is palpable / motivating / moving. The unity which is sought is illocutionary in the sense that it is based on substantive relationships rather than based simply on common interest or objectives. From the Representatives Group meeting of November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1993:

There were many ideas expressed concerning the lack of collective responsibility as well as a lack of power in Auroville to get something done. Most of the individuals feel that there should be some guidelines within all the working groups and areas of Auroville life,

but these guidelines should be the essentials. They should be flexible and handled with a lot of love and care as each individual's needs are different.

Extract 5.8. Theme V Representatives Group meeting November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1993 Issue #513.

## **5.2 Database Analysis Concluding Comments**

The method of coding the database generated recognition of unspoken agreements in Auroville regarding principles that guide the development of organization in the township. Illocutionary action is the common base of these themes. The seven themes are summarized below:

**Theme I:** The drive in Auroville for organization based on the principles of dyadic communication: Aurovilians seek a direct link in organization between individual mentality and social structure.

**Theme II:** Economic subsystem formation is a significant source of participation in and maintenance of consensus decision-making. Theme II pertains to the dynamics of decision-making generated in Auroville based on its adoption of the ideal of no private property: the control of assets remains communicative.

**Theme III:** The persistent renewal of economic organization / planning: the economy is based on illocutionary participation instead of the public following preset formulae.

**Theme IV:** The power of personal self-expression versus power over others as distortion of the former. Illocutionary communication, communication oriented to reaching mutual understanding, is the standard in Auroville, while other forms of communication are viewed as a distortion.

Theme V: The interest in substantive versus formal unity. Unity based on complementary functionality is not enough. Residents seek a unity which is palpable / motivating / moving.

Theme VI: The relationship between consensus-building and the systemization of power is characterized by a relationship of consensus-building and system-building responsive to people's aspirations, while not imposing a structure beyond the reach of anyone.

Theme VII: counter poses substance and semantics, relationships versus strategic action. Principles are not invented for strategic gains. Rather, the emergence of principles remains dialogical, communicative, and circumspect. Every step in Auroville is negotiated through actual relationships rather than dictated by the imposition of prescribed ideas.

The treatment of the themes in this chapter provide reason to argue that in Auroville the corresponding propositions on the part of Habermas have been adopted as principles of development. These propositions, described in Chapter Three, include the preeminent role in communication of illocutionary action, the principle of universality (U), the principle of discourse ethics (D), and the rules of discourse Habermas adopted from the work of R. Alexey (1978). Illocutionary action is the common base of each of these propositions. Arguing from these conclusions of the database analysis, I apply elements of Habermas' theory of communicative action in Chapter Six in order to examine the practical consequences of adoption of Habermas' discourse ethics.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **THEORETICAL ANALYSIS**

In Chapter Five, I presented my approach to coding the database of Auroville Notes / News resulting in the recognition of seven themes. Both the method adopted to code the database and the evidence presented to exemplify it allows me to argue that specific dimensions of Habermas' theory of communicative action and discourse ethics apply in practice among the residents of Auroville over time. In this chapter, I will review the connection between those dimensions of Habermas' thought and the seven themes. I will then draw upon the work of Arato and Cohen presented in Chapter Three in order to attempt to achieve two purposes: (1) to draw the results of the database analysis into the generalized theoretical scheme of Habermas; (2) to examine the ways in which the political practices of Aurovilians discernable in the database contribute to the theories of communicative action and discourse ethics.

#### **6.1 Theoretical Framing of Database Analysis**

Where illocutionary action pertains to action oriented to reaching mutual understanding, Habermas summarizes his conceptualization of communicative action in the following way:

I count as communicative action those linguistically mediated interactions in which all participants pursue illocutionary aims, and only illocutionary aims, with their mediating acts of communication. (Habermas 1984, 295)

Alford (1985, 336-337) notes that Habermas identified three means by which he could demonstrate “the universality of the concept of communicative rationality.” These three means were:

The first way of exploring communicative rationality, says Habermas, would be to construct hypotheses about which patterns of communicative rationality are in fact universal, and to check these against the actual intuitions and practices of speakers in a wide variety of societies and cultures. The second way would be to employ the theory of communicative rationality (i.e., universal pragmatics) as a practical technique, for example in the diagnosis of pathological communication, in order to check its empirical effectiveness and relevance. The third way, says Habermas, is to employ the theory of communicative rationality to interpret and reconstruct the tradition of social theory that runs from Weber to Parsons. (1985, 336-337)

Habermas chose the third option of examining the body of social thought from Weber to Parsons in order to demonstrate the problems that could be “solved by means of a theory of rationalization developed in terms of the basic concept of communicative action” (Habermas 1984, 139-140). The theory of communicative action was the result, in relation to which Habermas stated that he had sought to develop a social theory which would legitimate itself. It was a request for others to test, and thereby to add to and/or correct aspects of his abstract theory. The theoretical treatment of the database in this chapter is meant to contribute to the response to that request while at the same time draw the work of Aurovilians into theoretical discourse.

The themes identified in the database analysis correspond to the primary role illocutionary action plays for Habermas in his theory construction. Illocutionary action forms the basis for his formulation of the principle of universality (U), the principle of discourse ethics (D), and for drawing on the related rules of discourse formulated by R. Alexy (1978). The seven themes correspond to the principle (U):

A norm is reached on the basis of good reasons, and a rational consensus thereby attained, if and only if

- (a) each of those affected can convince the others, in terms they hold appropriate for the perception of both their own and others' interests, that the constraints and impacts of a norm's general observance are acceptable for all; and
- (b) each can be convinced by all, in terms she or he considers appropriate, that the constraints and impacts of norm's general observance are acceptable for all. (Rehg 1994, 75)

And, to the related principle of discourse ethics (D):

Only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as participants in a practical discourse. (Rehg 1994, 93)

And thirdly, to the specification of discourse ethics in the rules of discourse:

- (3.1) Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse.
- (3.2)
  - a. Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever.
  - b. Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse.
  - c. Everyone is allowed to express his attitudes, desires, and needs.
- (3.3) No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down in (3.1) and (3.2). (Habermas 1990, 89)

Theme VII in particular corresponds to the centrality of the goal of reaching mutual understanding to Habermas and his principle of discourse ethics. This theme brings into relief the principle of deciding together.

Theme VII counter poses substance and semantics, relationships versus strategic action. Principles are not invented for strategic gains. Rather, the emergence of principles remains dialogical, communicative, and circumspect. Rather than Auroville being a context where certain principles are imposed, the principle is one of deciding together.

Theme VII parallels what is moral discourse for Habermas. The emphasis on non-imposition in Auroville corresponds directly to the definition of discourse ethics and its specification in the rules of discourse.

Theme I also parallels what is one of the most compelling dimensions of Habermas' social theory: The construction of a theory of societal rationalization from propositions regarding what must necessarily be operating for mutual understanding to be achieved in dyadic communication. Theme I pertains to Aurovilians seeking a direct link in organization between individual mentality and social structure. This modeling of social structure on the communicative competence of individuals is also apparent in another theme:

Theme IV: the power of personal self-expression versus power over others as distortion of the former. Illocutionary communication, communication oriented to reaching mutual understanding, is the standard in Auroville, while other forms of communication are viewed as a distortion.

Habermas considers perlocutionary, or strategic, forms of communication to be derivative of illocutionary forms of communication.

Habermas' theory of communicative competence investigates the conditions under which speakers may arrive at mutual understanding. Discourse ethics pertains to the conditions in which speakers may agree to norms of behaviour. Habermas' efforts in these directions arise from his concern for the bases of solidarity in modernity, or the problem of modernity as discussed in Chapter Three. In the quote below, William Rehg is differentiating the discourse ethical notion of solidarity from alternative perspectives which have not presupposed the illocutionary foundation of communication. He

postulates them generically as Self Interest and Group Value arguing that the principle (U) operates even if unrecognized or intentionally dismissed. He argues that the principle (U) identifies the solidaristic basis of rational will formation. For Habermas, it follows from the illocutionary foundation of communication that both the subject and rationality emerge through communication. For both, the principle (U) identifies the solidarity that underlies language use itself, the solidarity which is the basis for our capability to be active agents in the world.

Here I want to differentiate the discourse-ethical notion of solidarity from that contained in the alternatives. In locating rational will-formation in (U), discourse ethics goes beyond both alternatives and lays claim to a deeper level of solidarity based on each individual's rational autonomy. Solidarity and autonomy are not separated, nor is solidarity restricted to the substantive level of like interests and worldviews. (1994, 170)

From this perspective diversity or difference in interest do not threaten solidarity. Because solidarity inheres in language use itself (Rehg 1994, 171), conformity to the content of communication is not a necessary condition for solidarity. Regarding situations for which conventional approaches are inadequate, facing the ensuing crises potentially generates the necessary grounds to achieve higher levels of learning for the group, the combination of greater participation with heightened capacity to participate. The residents of Auroville and Habermas are involved in the same task of finding the basis for solidarity in modernity. Where Aurovilians refer to Human Unity and approach the issue on a practical basis, Habermas' approach draws together what has been known and considered in the Western academic context. He reconstitutes this context based on his findings. Both approaches arrived at the necessity for each participant to freely participate in decision-making.

For Habermas, lifeworld is characterized by communicative action:



The lifeworld is, so to speak, the transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet, where they can reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the world (objective, social, or subjective), and where they can criticize and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements, and arrive at agreements...the lifeworld is constitutive for mutual understanding *as such*...speakers and hearers come to an understanding from out of their common lifeworld about something in the objective, social or subjective worlds. (Habermas 1987, 126)

Therefore in the theory of communicative action, the effort to reach mutual understanding is characteristic of the three terms: illocutionary action, communicative action and lifeworld.

As described in Chapter Three, Arato and Cohen seek to reconstruct civil society theoretically and practically based on Habermas' dual conception of society: lifeworld and system. They identify four theoretical gains consequent to translating aspects of lifeworld as civil society. In so doing, they identify key dynamics of Auroville development from a Habermasian perspective. In summary, the four points are:

- 1) The opening up of all dimensions of lifeworld to processes of communication and questioning. Reflexive normative consensus replaces convention allowing for a reflexive relation to tradition. Although the loss of a "unified corporate organization of society" follows from lifeworld differentiating into components according to value spheres, the possibility for social integration remains. Such modernization (rationalization) of the lifeworld encourages group formation and the autonomy of social actors. The result is "a plurality of actors" who may participate in the "redefinition or renegotiation" of a "horizon of mutually presupposed meanings and norms". (Arato and Cohen 1988, 202-203)
- 2) Lifeworld colonization, rather than the differentiation of value spheres into instrumental, moral-practical and aesthetic-expressive domains characteristic of

modernity, leads to losses of freedom, dependency and weakened solidarities. There is thus a “two-sided” character to the institutional domains of contemporary lifeworld carrying the potential for both the losses and gains associated with the modernization / rationalization of the lifeworld which is generated with increased systemization.

(Arato and Cohen 1988, 203-207)

- 3) Following from the dual dynamic of lifeworld - system, the institutional sphere of lifeworld may generate alternative potentials that Arato and Cohen call “institutional doubleness”. As a result of the interaction of a partially modernized lifeworld with the penetrations of system, lifeworld colonization, the same institutions may serve both positive and negative roles giving rise to alternative potentials, in this way demonstrating a “dualistic structure”. Secondly, a modernizing lifeworld has the potential to keep generating more associational forms as established ones bureaucratize into formal organizations. (Arato and Cohen 1988, 207)

Modernized cultural forms set in motion discursive practices and expectations that cannot be kept away entirely from everyday life through selective institutionalization. (Arato and Cohen 1988, 207)

- 4) Through the communicative coordination of the institutional core of civil society, there is the potential to achieve a “self-limiting radical democracy”. The expansion of democratic practice would be self-limiting because the dynamics of lifeworld – system formulated by Habermas asserts a direct relationship between the efficiency of the subsystems and the expanding potential for the communicative coordination of lifeworld institutions. (Arato and Cohen 1988, 209-10)

Systemization generates the potential for lifeworld rationalization, the opening up of all dimensions of lifeworld to questioning, which generates the movement from

traditional to post-conventional society. This does not necessarily eliminate tradition; it breaks down a “traditionalistic relationship to tradition” (Arato and Cohen 1988, 202). Through its distinctive steering media of money and power, systemization acts back on its communicative sources truncating them consistent with the institutional, rather than the originating, goals of the systems (lifeworld colonization). Systemization has been an expression and then an uncoupling of the instrumental domain. Cultural rationalization in which lifeworld has begun to differentiate into instrumental, moral-practical and aesthetic-expressive value domains is limited by the selective rationalization: lifeworld colonization acts to limit rationalization in the moral-practical and aesthetic-expressive domains. The interaction of lifeworld and system thus generates both gains and losses, benefits and disadvantages, for the public. Arato and Cohen identify the potential to achieve in this context what they refer to as a self-limiting radical democracy. They envision:

...the creation of forms of social control over state and economy (through the expansion of sets of representative institutions within and between them) that are compatible with a modernized lifeworld. The two steps presupposes each other: only an adequately defended, differentiated and organized civil society is capable of monitoring and influencing the outcomes of steering processes, but only a civil society capable of influencing the state and economy can help to maintain the structure of rights that are the sine qua non of its own existence. (Arato and Cohen 1988, 215)

Arato and Cohen through their effort to reconstruct a theory of civil society express in a cogent manner a comprehension of Habermas’ dual conception of society useful for the analytical task of this chapter. Rather than a categorical understanding (Sitton), they express in brief terms the dynamic interaction between lifeworld and system and set a vision for a society in which a post conventional lifeworld generates a network of institutions which serve two purposes: (1) to ensure the gains of ongoing

lifeworld rationalization, and; (2) to exert communicative influence over systems steered by the media of money and power. For these reasons, I will draw upon their points and their vision in this chapter to examine the dynamic of systemization in Auroville: the dialectical relationship between consensus-building and the systemization of power. I will draw exemplary material from the database primarily from the post activation of the Auroville Foundation Act phase, January 1991 through July 1994. Lifeworld colonization, systemization and lifeworld rationalization characterize this phase in which the residents of Auroville respond to the implementation of the Foundation Act by government appointed officials. I will set the stage for this phase of systemization by drawing antecedent material from earlier developmental phases which exemplify features of the database analysis outlined in Chapter Five.

## **6.2 The Dialectical Relationship between Consensus-building and the Systematization of Power in Auroville**

Transitions in organization in February 1984 exemplify the correspondence between the axial codes:

Economic Subsystem Formation and Political Subsystem Formation;

Economic Subsystem Breakdown and Political Subsystem Formation;

In relation to the axial codes:

Push Factors for Political Subsystem Formation;

Operating Principles – Coordination between Groups.

The terminating of Auroville's financial organization, the Envelope System, for March 1984 occurred along with Pour Tous ending the provision of food supplies to

individuals through their communities. The substantive breakdown was insufficient resources to meet the requirements of these systems. The breakdown in economic organization gave rise to the renewal of the decision-making and executive bodies in place since 1976 and 1978 respectively: the Pour Tous Meeting became the Advisory Council Meeting; the Auroville Cooperative became the Executive Council. The Pour Tous Meeting of February 1984 confirmed the Advisory Council Meetings as Auroville's ultimate decision-making body. It also approved the names solicited from the residents for membership on the new Executive Council and the names proposed for trustees of the soon to be established educational institute, the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research. Economic subsystem breakdown occurred characteristically with greater engagement in political subsystem formation, as illustrated in Chapter Five Table 5.2. Crisis – Engagement in Auroville. Auroville system formation typically attempts to integrate individual and collective considerations. In the minds of many residents, conventional patterns of money exchange risk some participants being left behind others. The efforts to coordinate and organize the economy are attempts to bring the collective side to the fore to achieve a common baseline of support for individual action. Hence efforts such as those depicted below in Extract 6.1 to bring representatives of several work groups together. The effort to formulate financial coordination in anticipation of the end of the Envelope System resulted in the formation of a new group for financial coordination, the Finance and Maintenance Group.

Auroville Finances are also in transition to a new form. There will be a working meeting this Tuesday afternoon (14<sup>th</sup>) between Auroville Fund workers together with Michael for Auromitra, Arjun for MM< Uli for Aurelec etc. In an attempt at reorganisation, the idea being to see which regular contributors can best cover what Envelope commitments, and to do this each month. Details for a wider change in the Envelopes are being worked on simultaneously and it is hoped will provide a more

solid base for Auroville finances. Changes are obviously needed on the level of participation to Envelope meetings, participation meaning work, commitment and responsibility. The present set-up should phase out by end March and so the next Advisory Council meeting on Feb. 24<sup>th</sup> will be a special meeting to study these proposals.

Extract 6.1. Planning for transitions in economic organization. Advisory Council Meeting February 10<sup>th</sup> 1984 Issue #37.

The excerpt below from a letter May 1988 to all Aurovilians from the Auroville Council (formerly Executive Council) indicates the mediating role of the executive body as Auroville moves out of the phase of decentralization toward the phase of anticipating the activation of the Auroville Foundation. It also sets out the role of the precursor to the Representatives Group, the Core Group, and its relation in conjunction with the Auroville Council to the General Assembly (formerly Advisory Council Meeting).

Auroville Council

To

All Aurovilians.

Hello,

We, the Auroville Council, wish to introduce ourselves to you, all. The new council members are Barbara, Judith, Diane, Dee, Aster, Janet, Raman, Alan, Serge, Peter C.S., Shankar. The key words of our aspiration are “Oneness” “practicality”, “Efficiency”, “Effectiveness”, and “Connectedness”.

The new Auroville Council wishes to be a focal point for a new move towards a more collective quality of life in Auroville. And we wish to emphasize that we consider the new experimental core group as very important for our working.

How does it work? What does it mean for you?

Let's say you have an issue you wish to bring to the collective forum, a question, a problem, a project – whatever – how do you go about it?

First put the whole thing clearly down on paper – this is a good exercise for you to clarify your thinking and helps the council to have your story first-hand. You can then give your note to the following persons: Alan, who will be in Samridhi every morning; Diane, who will be in Aurofuture, Raman, who will be in the A.R.C. Office at Bharat Nivas; Judith or Barbara, who will be available at the Secretariat.

If the matter is routine and a clear-cut policy already exists – the Auroville Council will deal with the matter, and let you know.

If the matter is debatable, the role of the council will be to collect facts and information, contact the people involved or with the appropriate expertise, and bring the matter and a factual report to Core Group.

It will be the function of the Core group to discuss issues and policies and, wherever possible, arrive at conclusions. The conclusions will be brought to the General Meeting, to be held the first Monday of each month, so the general body of Auroville will as always, have the final word.

The Auroville Council also wishes to actively initiative moves, in conjunction with the Core Group, towards improving the quality of life in Auroville in the light of our aspirations – and hopefully you will hear more of this very soon.

Above all we want to be in touch with Auroville and our fellow Aurovilians, with no sense of Separation, We wish to be of service to us all and her vision.

Extract 6.2. Letter from Auroville Council May 1988 Issue #237.

During the decentralized phase of the mid to late 1980's, participation was unstable in both the Auroville wide decision-making meetings and the executive body. From the passage of the Foundation Act in September 1988, anticipation of the need to meet its activation with well functioning economic and political systems intensified participation in the planning and implementing of ongoing innovations. The collision of Auroville's nascent networking system of decision-making with that of the formal bureaucracy of the Auroville Foundation orchestrated by the Government of India characterized the post activation of the Foundation phase.

The challenge of the Auroville Foundation was a direct result of weaknesses in Auroville's decision-making culture. Auroville wide decision-making meetings sometimes flounder through low participation. Consistent with participation in Auroville in general, participation in meetings and work groups, such as the Auroville Council, is voluntary. The pattern of participation identified in the relationship between crisis and

engagement in Table 5.2 needs to be understood in the context of an economy in which work in the majority of situations in Auroville does not correspond to a wage or a salary. A maintenance by the late 1980's corresponded to the amount supplied to a resident for their livelihood through the work group to which they contributed their time and energy. It was set on a township-wide basis by the Maintenance Group based on collective income. A household survey conducted in 1989 by the Economy Task Group indicates that approximately 40% of residents were completely dependent on this maintenance, others were partially dependent on it along with external sources, and others were independent of maintenance through the commercial units they had started or from their own resources. The Auroville maintenance system is a partial delinking of work and money. A strong relationship between crisis and engagement emerges in the context of the three levels of participation in Auroville (formal work, community work in the settlement in which one lives, political participation). Full participation is very demanding and, with the exception of commercial unit holders, does not correspond to acquisition or control of greater personal resources.

The axial code, Challenges to Consensus Formation, provides explicit recognition with regards to weaknesses in consensus formation in Auroville primarily with respect to the Auroville-wide decision-making assembly (identified with different names over time). Drawing from this node, obstacles identified to effective consensus formation from 1983 include:

- |        |  |
|--------|--|
| Jan 84 | Low participation;   |
| Nov 86 | Absence of the particular participants needed from specific work groups for effective decision-making; |



|        |   |
|--------|---|
| Nov 86 | Lack of workable meeting organization and chairing: Meetings are non-productive; too little structure in which participants may pull the meeting their own way or subject other participants to emotional attacks; or too much structure where participation in the meetings feels stifled.   |
| Mar 87 | Feeling of being steam rolled in consensus. Not enough time given. Not all voices heard. Sometimes the expression of endless personal preferences.  |
| Apr 87 | Lack of adequate information; absence of key-people; personalization of issues; predominance of one viewpoint over others (“steamrolling”); time wasted through irrelevance or lack of focus; lack of clarity about agreed procedures regarding decision-making; frustration due to different expectations regarding the purpose of a meeting; lack of preparation. |
| Apr 87 | Level of personal reaction;   |
| Feb 91 | Decisions taken to community for ratification rather than dialogue.   |
| Feb 91 | “In certain situations, reference to the community or other groups had proved untenable and inefficient. Untenable when an immediate response to a situation was required; and inefficient, due to lack of attendance at community meetings, and the prevalence of rhetoric rather than resolution.”  |
| Apr 91 | The lack of proper dissemination of information within the community at large.  |
| Apr 91 | Low attendance;   |
| Apr 91 | People leaving meetings early; therefore decisions taken by relatively few.   |

Specific measures taken to redress these concerns from 1987 onwards included a small group of Aurovilians volunteering to work out methods and apply them as facilitators for the meetings. Seminars on issues such as the economy and internal organization became regular means to ensure an informed public and that their concerns were the primary resource for proposing solutions. In April 1988, the General Meeting approved the formation of a Core Group approving the names suggested for its membership. In May, it commenced its role to examine community wide issues, its first task being to reexamine the role of the Executive Council and suggest names for its

reconstitution. Occasions of low attendance in the Core Group and its replacement, the Representatives Group, are also evidenced in the Node, Challenges to Consensus Formation.

Despite the weaknesses recognized in their practice of consensus decision-making, the response on the part of residents to the activation of the Foundation Act was to intensify participation in and elaboration of their network of decision-making. With regard to economic organization, efforts resulted in the centralization of the accounting of maintenance and exchange within the township accomplished in the organizational phase in anticipation of the Foundation 1988-1991. With regard to political organization, participation and elaboration increased further with the challenges presented by Foundation officials in the phase which followed.

### **6.2.1 Auroville and “the Order”**

In this section, I include exemplary material from one process in Auroville which demonstrates a push factor for political subsystem formation (axial code): activation of the Auroville Foundation. I follow the issuance on the part of the Auroville Foundation of Office Order #5 (OO#5) to exemplify how residents faced lifeworld colonization represented by the penetration of governmental systemization into their network form of consensus decision-making. The response on the part of Auroville resulted in a merging over years between Foundation officials and the residents of Auroville regarding how the experiment may operate according to its originating intention. The Auroville response demonstrates Point 1 from Arato and Cohen above: lifeworld rationalization, an increase in the questioning of, and discourse about, the meaning and functioning of their endeavor

and the institutions that embody it, occurred along with increased systemization, the further elaboration of their network form of decision-making as adaptation to Foundation demands. One may conceive of Auroville's network form of decision-making as lifeworld institutions because it is communication which steers them. In this case, they constitute civil society according to Arato and Cohen. On the other hand, they are proto systems because they take up the functions of state and economy. The distinction of Auroville institutions is that they have not uncoupled from lifeworld according to the expectations of Habermas' scheme. This section will provide indications of why they have not uncoupled. Ironically the explanation for their actions is provided by Habermas. Aurovilians are unwilling to compromise mutual understanding / illocutionary action as the principle of decision-making. The principle upon which Habermas constructs his theory of communicative action is the principle of organization in Auroville. The Foundation officials who took up their roles in the spring of 1991 were tuned to a different comprehension of organization, one based on the conventions of ownership and hierarchical power. Their way to help Auroville develop was to impose a minimal system: a committee for asset management, a committee for finance, and the formulation of the Rules of the Auroville Foundation to be passed by the Parliament of India to which all must abide, all based on the legal ownership of a township which according to its understanding of its own Charter stood for surpassing ownership as an organizational principle. The first wave of Foundation officials interpreted the Foundation Act to mean that the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation was responsible for the assets and management of Auroville on behalf of the Governing Board. While Auroville institutions are by virtue of their functioning lifeworld institutions according to Habermas and civil

society according to Arato and Cohen, they are systems according to their role. Despite this unclear seam in Auroville between lifeworld and system, it is clear that the Government of India through the Auroville Foundation sought to implant a formal system based on a conventional comprehension of economy and polity. The authors of the Act sought to integrate Auroville systems, such as the formalizing of Auroville's general assemblies into the Residents Assembly as a constitutional body, into their plan for Foundation ownership and management of Auroville. It is this move by the Government of India through the Foundation toward an ownership and hierarchy based systemization in Auroville by building on the township's own systems where one may claim the appropriate application of Habermas' concept of lifeworld colonization. Auroville was indeed faced with a challenge similar in proportion to the ownership and management claims of the SAS from 1975. Where power (governmental) could have meant an intrusion of their freedoms, Aurovilians recognized the alternative potentials (Points 2 and 3 from Arato and Cohen) available in their systems in order to activate and elaborate institutions in such a way as to retain decision-making power according to their practice of reaching mutual understanding (lifeworld practice / communicative action). By so doing, they exemplify Point 4 from Arato and Cohen, approaching the potential of a "self-limiting radical democracy". Aurovilians fulfill the two steps envisioned by Arato and Cohen in this regard: (1) "an adequately defended, differentiated and organized civil society...capable of monitoring and influencing the outcomes of steering processes" and; (2) "a civil society capable of influencing the state and economy"... "through the expansion of sets of representative institutions within and between them" (1988, 215).

The Foundation was activated in January 1991. Auroville assets were formally transferred to the Foundation in April 1992. The first Indian Administrative Officer appointed by the Human Resource Ministry joined his post in the spring of 1991. The Foundation made specific constitutional demands including: Formulation of the Rules of the Auroville Foundation, establishment of a Finance Committee and an Assets Committee, and submission of a Master Plan of development. By 1991, almost 90 units had been established in Auroville, commercial, service, educational, development and research. In spring of 1992, it took resident unit holders by surprise that the Secretary of the Foundation had formulated and sent to them a document which entrusted to them the management of their units on behalf of the Auroville Foundation. The document read:

“Office Order No.5” dated 14.05.1991

Whereas the said undertaking has vested in the Auroville Foundation established by notification No.F.27-33/88-UU dated 29.1.1991 of the Government of India with effect from 1.4.1992 together with the right, title and interest vide notification No.F.27-15/91-UU dated 29.4.1992 of the Government of India, it has become necessary to take appropriate measure for the general superintendence, direction, control and management of the undertaking. Accordingly, I, L.K. Tripathy, I.A.S., Secretary to the Auroville Foundation appointed U/S 15(1) of the Auroville Foundation Act 1988, in exercise of the powers conferred on me under section 7(1) (a) of the said Act appoint you name of executives as executives of the said undertaking and authorize you to carry on for and on behalf of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, the management of the said undertaking till further orders subject to the following restrictions and conditions: -

- (i) The undertaking shall have its head office in Auroville at all times;
- (ii) You shall abide by the Charter of Auroville and its spirit;
- (iii) The immovable assets of the undertaking whether inside or outside Auroville shall not be disposed of or pledged for raising loans without specific permission of the Secretary in consultation with the Working Committee. For acquisition of the immovable assets, whether inside or outside Auroville, the permission of the Secretary in consultation with the Working Committee will have to be obtained. Whenever after consultations with the ABC or other relevant working groups, secretary still considers that a transaction is not in the best interest of Auroville, he will refer the matter to the Chairman/ Governing Board for a decision;

- (iv) The Secretary will appoint executives on the recommendation of the ABC when vacancies of the executives will arise in any of the following events;
  - a) Resignation,
  - b) Death,
  - c) Bankruptcy,
  - d) Person becomes of unsound mind or is otherwise incapable of acting,
  - e) Person has been convicted of a major criminal offence
- (v) The Secretary will appoint executives to fill vacancies arising in an undertaking in consultation with the remaining unit executives and the ABC.
- (vi) You shall abide by the decisions of the Governing Board in matters relating to the Auroville Township development.
- (vii) Certified copy of the balance sheet of the undertaking shall be submitted by you annually to the Secretary not later than 30<sup>th</sup> June of every year.
- (viii) You will provide all facilities to the Secretary or any officer of the Foundation designated by him to verify the accounts as and when required.
- (ix) You shall pay all taxes and other statutory dues, charges and contribution to Auroville Foundation required to be paid by the undertaking.
- (x) You shall make regular contribution to the Auroville Foundation. The form of contributions may be in cash, kind and/or service to the community. Presently, the contribution will be a minimum of 33% of the net profit to be given in monthly installments. However, the quantum of contribution can be reduced on grounds of genuine hardship or when the unit goes for expansion/major capital investment. In such a contingency, the amount to be contributed by your unit will be determined by the Secretary in consultation with the ABC and the Auroville Finance Committee.
- (xi) You will be competent to take all such steps necessary in the best interest of the unit in its commercial operations.
- (xii) You can enter into agreement with outside parties, raise monies for business purposes, pledge movable assets of the business, open and operate bank accounts, enter into collaboration with outside parties including foreign firms and companies for technology or marketing tie-up subject to compliance with the rules and policies of the Government.
- (xiii) The Immovable assets entrusted to the undertakings can also be pledged for raising a loan after obtaining permission of the Secretary based on the recommendations of the ABC.

L.K. Tripathy,  
Secretary,  
Auroville Foundation.

Extract 6.3. Version of OO#5 extracted from letter from Judith to AV News May 1992 Issue #441.

Many unit holders signed; many would not, on principle. To the latter, the letter by the Secretary raised questions whether the Foundation put the *raison d'être* of Auroville in doubt. For many, OO#5 symbolized and specified the control of Auroville by the Foundation. The unit holder of Auroville Fund, a unit which was a legal channel to receive funds for Auroville projects, was one unit holder who made her objections to the signature explicit to the Secretary and all residents at once in a letter published on the Creative Page May 1992 Issue #441. Judith's (England) letter provides context for the prolonged process which followed by demonstrating the significances of an "order" or an ownership claim in Auroville. Her letter also demonstrates the significance of mutual agreement in the evolution of Auroville organization. I draw short excerpts from her letter inserting the appropriate article of OO#5 in italics to match her references when necessary:

...If the spirit of Auroville is to be followed, there is plenty of room to arrive at satisfactory mutual agreements between the Aurovilian executives of the units and the Governing Board, which would change the whole flavor of our relationship from the very beginning – we really have to work to make this happen now.

Now points (i) (iii) (vii) (viii) (ix) (xi) (xii) (xiii), if the whole concept of ordering was replaced by an attitude of mutual respect, could be a base for a mutual agreement between the Governing Board and the unit executives...

*In reference to point (ii): You shall abide by the Charter of Auroville and its spirit;*

This whole document with its whole tone of ownership and bossing people around is a 100% contravention of the Charter of Auroville. The Governing Board and the secretary are making the same mistake as the SAS- they start to get the mind-frame of OWNERS not recognizing that they, like us, are only TRUSTEES (and not, I might add Trustees for the government but Trustees for Humanity as a whole...

No one can ORDER anyone to abide by the Charter of Auroville. To even try to is to reveal a total ignorance of the meaning and implications of being an Aurovilian and of the Charter itself.

*In reference to point (vi) You shall abide by the decisions of the Governing Board in matters relating to the Auroville Township development.*

...How can the Governing Board come to decisions without the agreement of the people involved? They can try of course – but as we all know from long experience, they are wasting their time. Auroville doesn't work like that and if it ever starts to work like that we shall know for sure we are not living according to the Charter of Auroville.

*In reference to item (x) You shall make regular contribution to the Auroville Foundation...*

... this GUIDELINE has evolved from a series of mutual agreements, and never had anything to see with RULES and ORDERS.

All the unit holders I have met have expressed that they want to be part of this decision-making process. They want to arrive at mutual agreement – they don't want the Secretary to determine. And when they say "I've signed for receiving the document but that doesn't mean I agree with it" – this is what they are talking about. This attitude of the Secretary reveals a total misunderstanding of what an Aurovilian unit executives [sic] is, and what he/she is doing and the motivation behind the work and it really isn't acceptable.

*...In such a contingency, the amount to be contributed by your unit will be determined by the Secretary in consultation with the ABC and the Auroville Finance Committee.*

...the Auroville Finance Committee has no mandate what so ever from the Auroville community to negotiate profit contributions with Auroville commercial units - nor for that matters does the ABC. Auroville has, since a very long time, always had an indigenous working group to do this job. From the days of Pour Tous, through the Envelopes, the Auroville Maintenance Group to the present day Economy Group...

Extract 6.4. Excerpts from letter from Judith regarding OO#5 to AV News May 1992 Issue #441.

By June, Judith requested an initiative to redraft OO#5. The Working Committee reported her request and their initiatives:



A letter was received from Judith advising that discussions be in process on the re-drafting of office order No.5, and requesting us to inform the secretary of this fact. This has been taken up with the secretary. At present we are in the middle of discussions between the group of 20-unit executive who have made objections to office order no.5 and Mr. Tripathy.

Extract 6.5. Working Committee Report regarding OO#5 June 1992 Issue #445.

At the request of three unit holders who would not sign the order, a Residents Assembly on the topic of OO#5 was held in Aspiration community. 160 residents attended the meeting. The extract of verbal contributions to the meeting which best explains both the resolutions of the meeting and the ensuing process is the following:

The present decision making process in AV is unacceptable. The existing problems have been aggravated by the authoritarian behaviour of the secretary in issuing office order No.5. The decision making structure in AV needs to change. The Governing Board is holding the power and delegating it to the secretary, therefore it was emphasized that to change the existing structure, we must build a strong base and must not be divided. We need to build trust and confidence. We need to insist that the Residents Assembly and the Working committee have the power, so that Aurovilians take major decisions, not the Governing Board.

Extract 6.8. Residents Assembly Meeting July 1992 Issue #448.

The propositions approved by show of hands by those present at the assembly linked (1) community backing for the people who had refused to sign OO#5, and (2) that the community should reject the order, to (3) the need to address the relationships between and responsibilities of the International Advisory Council, the Governing Board and the Residents Assembly. Judith (England), Francis (America) and Serge (France) were charged with formulating a paper directed toward the Governing Board with the assistance of the Working Committee to present to a future Residents Assembly. The current RA had identified the problem of OO#5 not only with the new Secretary but also with shortcomings in Auroville's pattern of decision-making process and therefore renewed efforts began toward political subsystem formation.

Efforts to remake the status quo with regards to the internal organization of Auroville began with the paper developed and presented by Judith, Francis and Serge to the next Residents Assembly. Part of the preamble included:

The first line of Auroville's charters reads: "Auroville belongs to nobody in particular, but to humanity as a whole". Therefore, though the Auroville Foundation Act has transferred the ownership of all assets in accordance with Indian law to the Auroville Foundation, the attitude of all authorities and executives of the Foundation and of all Aurovilians has to be one of 'stewardship', holding the assets in trust for humanity as a whole.

The Governing Board shares with the Residents' Assembly and the International Advisory Council the task for ensuring Auroville's growth towards ideals expressed in the charter of Auroville. In this light any major policy decision concerning Auroville's affairs has to be taken together with the Residents' Assembly.

Extract 6.9. Excerpt from paper prepared for the Residents Assembly of August 1992 Issue #448.

The letter recommended the transfer of responsibilities from the Governing Board through the Secretary to the Working Committee who would delegate individual unit responsibilities:

This process will have the following advantages:

It will reflect the shared responsibilities for Auroville's assets between the Governing Board and the Residents' Assembly;

There will be a continuation of the process of self management which has been encouraged in the last twelve years under the previous Act and which aim has been repeated in the present Act;

It will enable the Residents' Assembly to progressively grow in response to an inner need, rather than from an external authority;

The direct transfer of management by the secretary to the individual unit executives is leading to separation and division within the community; whereas the transfer of management through the working committee as representative of the Residents' Assembly to the unit executives will encourage a sense of unity.

Extract 6.10. Excerpt from paper prepared for Residents Assembly of August 1992 Issue #448.

The paper outlined the organization the authors envisioned for the relationship between the Governing Board, the Secretary and the Residents Assembly with regards to transfer of management, specifically the management of units, creation of new units, management of immovable assets, grant of visa and a clear statement on the relationship between the Secretary and the Residents Assembly. The paper ended with an invitation from the Residents Assembly inviting the Governing Board to discuss the paper.

The Residents Assembly of July 31<sup>st</sup> attended by over 125 residents brought to the fore the need to specify decision-making practices in both the Residents Assembly and the Working Committee. The Foundation was indeed pushing political subsystem formation. The paper was accepted by a show of hands. Four people present wanted specific revisions, four people had left the meeting, and six people had objected to the paper through articles submitted to the Auroville News. The Residents Assembly meeting resolved to call a meeting for all those in the community who wanted to participate in redrafting the paper. Two participants were delegated to meet the six people who had objected in print to see if their concerns could be met in the redrafting of the paper. Another participant was delegated to meet with the four people who had left the meeting so that their concerns could be communicated to the working group responsible for redrafting the paper. A Residents Assembly was called for August to accept or reject the redrafted paper.

As demonstrated above, Aurovilians sometimes resort to voting to come to a resolution in a meeting. Dissatisfaction with that practice when its accepted in a meeting was one of the issues related to internal organization expressed in the meeting of July 31<sup>st</sup>. Sanjeev (India) expresses a similar concern in the Auroville News:

It has been the experience of many of us on the present working committee that taking a vote on an issue divides us and does not always lead to a decision with which we can move forward.

Extract 6.11. Sanjeev on the practice of voting Issue #450.

Seeking resolution to OO#5 reasserted along with other issues generated by the activation of the Foundation the need to organize politically in such a way not to leave people behind (example of Theme VI: System-building responsive to people's aspirations while not imposing a structure beyond the reach of anyone). Hence the urging in the meeting above to address the concerns of each of the dissenters to the draft paper.

The proposals of the paper presented to the Governing Board on August 14<sup>th</sup> 1992 were not accepted by the Chairman of the GB as a resolution of the Residents Assembly but the opinion of a group. The demands for increased organization of the Residents Assembly and the deadline for an election for the Working Committee on the part of the Chairman constituted pressures towards adopting the efficiency of a conventional representative democratic format. The paper was not taken further with the GB, rather it helped to serve those concerned with internal organization as a model to generate debate on what organization Auroville did want to develop.

In 1993 the Secretary declared again that the Auroville Maintenance Fund was an illegal operation because the unit holder had refused to sign OO#5. This fund disbursed monthly maintenance amounts to the Auroville public through their Financial Service accounts. The sources of the funding at this time were primarily internal individual and commercial unit contributions and externally sourced funding all channeled through the Central Fund system implemented by the Economy Group from June 1989 (approved by General Meeting of February 1989). Although the Secretary did not agree to its legality, concerned residents, given the urgency of the flow of individual maintenances, sought to

allow time for a resolution to the OO#5 controversy by proposing that the Auroville Maintenance Fund Order be signed by two members of the Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC). The FAMC, established in February 1993, was the compromise developed between resident forums and Foundation officials in regards to the constitutional demand of the Act for an Assets Management Committee and a Finance Committee. Rather than a management committee, it became a representative body of 12 members integrated into Auroville's decision-making network. The Foundation was most often represented on this committee by its Finance Officer. The FAMC drafted its role in Auroville in the following manner:

The FAMC will perform a double role:

A purely internal role of functioning as a working group within Auroville, which does not require the participation from the secretary;

An official role, when it functions as a legal body of the Auroville Foundation, along with the Secretary in its deliberations.

Extract 6.12. Excerpt from the draft document of the role of the FAMC August 1993 Issue #499.

The current effort with regards to OO#5 was to make a temporary agreement between the Secretary and the FAMC members, Guy (Belgium) and Rathinam (Tamil Nadu), so that the maintenance fund would continue to operate while a better solution could be found. This tactic was approved twice in the Residents Assembly, in November of 1993 and the winter of 1994, each time for a period of three months while residents investigated a more permanent solution. The Secretary objected to this approach because he said the FAMC was not a legally constituted body until the Rules of the Auroville Foundation had been passed in Parliament in New Delhi.

The following is a discourse between Otto (Austria), unit holder of the Auroville Maintenance Fund, and Guy (Belgium), co trustee of the Centre of Scientific Research

and executive of the Project Coordination Group, at the Residents Assembly held in November 1993 to decide the issue of whether the community would support the action of Guy and Rathinam who signed OO#5 on behalf of the Auroville Maintenance Fund:

## **511 – Nov 93 – pp. 4-6**

### **RESIDENTS' ASSEMBLY**

Present: Alan, Alain, Alok, Andy, Anil, Anita, Annemarie, Anton, Anu, Ashok, Aster, Bhaga, Bhavana, Bill, Claudine, Cristo, dinar, Ed, Eleanor, Francois Gr., Francoise, Gadje, Genevieve, Gerard, Girvani, Gil, Gillian, Goupi, Guy, Ireno, Jacky, Jacques, Jan, Janet, Janna, Jean Leg, Joss, Jossie, Juanita, Jorgen, Jyothi Prem, Lucas, Mario, Mary, Menaig, MichaelZ. Nico, Otto, Pala, Patrick, Paul P., Paul vincent, Pavitra, Philip, Piero, Pierre Tram, Prasad, Prem, Raja Raman, Rathinam, Rita, Sandra, Santo, Santosh, Selvaraj, Sigrid, Subramaniam, Sundaram, Suhasini, Susannah, Suzanne, Suzie, Tapas, Tine, Tom, Thymian, Vasanti, Vijaya, Vinod and about ten others.

Chairpersons: Alan and Bhavana

Minutes: Janet

### **AGENDA**

- 1 AV Maintenance Fund
- 2 Ratification of new member to working committee
- 3 WC's letter to Karan Singh
5. Update on previous WC's letter to K. Singh re Secretary and Register of Residents.

#### **1. AV Maintenance Fund**

The RA was asked to decide if they supported the signing of OO#5 for AV Maintenance Fund by two members of the FAMC for a period of three months (Oct. 1 – Dec. 31) in order to give Auroville sufficient time to find a solution that was legal, true to the spirit of AV and acceptable to all parties.

First Otto, the unit holder of AV Maintenance Fund explained why he had not signed, and then Guy told us why he and Rathinam had signed for three months, pending ratification by the Residents Assembly.

Otto: The main issue is how the AVF Act is being implemented. OO#5 reflects this. This is why people take stands. There are 2 issues: 1. Whether we must sign this order? And 2. What do we Aurovilians want to do?

Now we sign because we get external pressure.

We need discipline and order, but on a basis, which reflects, our inner needs, rather than government rules and regulations. In addition we have six months from the Governing Board to decide how we will function internally.

If we want something else, we must decide what it is and then act on it.

We can see how Karan Singh [Chairman of the Governing Board] and the Secretary are functioning, and the direction we will go in if we get into the ways of government agencies.

I don't want to be more reasonable, but more true. As I represent Pour Tous and the AV Maintenance Fund, services used by all, I need to know what Auroville wants.

Guy: I am also not happy with the way the AVF Act is functioning, but it is the frame in which we function today. Under the Act, the responsibility for management lies with the Governing Board and the Secretary, who are accountable to the Indian Parliament and Government?

However because they do not personally manage our units, they reappoint executives who are accountable to the Governing Board and Secretary. Because of that they issued 00#5.

00#5 gives full autonomy to the unit executive to manage on condition that 1. Assets remain part of the community and 2. He or she is accountable by submitting the unit accounts at the end of the financial year.

It is not reasonable to challenge 00#5 as it is a normal consequence of the AVF Act. If we want to challenge something, we have to challenge the Act itself.

When the assets came directly under the Custodian, unit holders were supposed to sign 00#5, which had nearly the same wording. All signed, including those who are not willing to sign today.

It is difficult to defend the argument that the AV Maintenance Fund is solely part of our internal functioning as funds come from both inside and outside sources, including the government. The Secretary is legally responsible for it. So it is normal that he insists that someone sign for handling these funds, as he does not handle them himself.

If no one had signed at the beginning of October, the functioning of the Auroville Maintenance Fund would have been disrupted and the Central Fund, which is the only tool of our collective economy at present, would have been stopped. This is the main and most important reason why Rathinam and myself have signed.

Otto: Last year 150 people were discussing this issue and decided OO#5 should not be signed, but this decision was not respected. Now people are fed up.

In September we had the possibility of trying to find a solution, but the people were disillusioned with the way the meeting functioned.

Guy: The Working Committee could not sign because it's not a legal body. Now the possibility is there with FAMC. When FAMC becomes legal it can share the responsibility with the GB. When one signs for the AV Maintenance Fund, one signs only for a channel for the funds. We can still utilize the funds as we wish and be experimental with our economy.

Extract 6.13. Excerpt from Residents Assembly meeting November 1993 Issue #511.

The meeting decided by a show of hands to support the action of Guy and Rathinam valid for the defined period October to December for the purposes stated. The meeting also struck a study group to examine the technical problems raised by OO#5. Although Guy and Rathinam had acted unilaterally with respect to the community as a whole, they remained responsible to the Residents Assembly to make their arguments public and withdraw their signatures if they were not supported by the assembly.

Previous to the Residents Assembly cited above and in response to the request by the Working Committee to deliberate on the OO#5 issue, the FAMC had advised members of the Working Committee in August that their suggestion to have the FAMC sign OO#5 on behalf of dissenting units would not work because it was not a legal body until the Parliament of India passed the Rules of the Auroville Foundation. The action of Guy and Rathinam was indeed a stop gap procedure to keep the maintenance fund operating. The second suggestion by the Working Committee had been for the FAMC to deliberate on the possibility of Auroville redrafting OO#5 in a manner acceptable to both the residents and the Secretary. By consulting with the Secretary, the FAMC communicated to the Working Committee that the Secretary considered that to be a possibility after the "Rules" had been passed, which he believed could be quite some



time, and that at that juncture the FAMC could be authorized to sign “on behalf of the Foundation.” Despite the advice from the FAMC to the Working Committee that unit holders should be asked to sign OO#5, the next procedure involved the redrafting of OO#5 as a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the sake of the 20 dissenting units. Rather than conforming to the office order, the dissent of the 20 units was being facilitated by Auroville’s internal organization.

The MOU was signed by several units yet by 1996 it was still not formally accepted as a legal document by the Governing Board. In the meantime, the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation was replaced twice by secretaries much more sympathetic to the concerns of the Aurovilians than the original one had been. There was no longer a threat of expulsion to Aurovilians who would not conform to the office order and day-to-day functioning of units without clear legal status were facilitated in their operations by virtue of being able to open bank accounts through the Financial Service. Functioning between the secretaries and the Working Committee became one of mutual respect. In 1995, Auroville ceased to issue OO#5. By the autumn of 1996, there were 35 units to be regularized. In January 1997, all of these commercial units came under a new business trust, ABC (Auroville Board of Commerce) Trust for a temporary period of three years, again a provisional arrangement although coming with clear legal status. The Working Committee had been making efforts for years to enable Auroville to open new Trusts. By 1997, there was a spectrum of arrangements for Auroville activities. Those units which had not rejected OO#5 legally came directly under the Foundation. Other activities, units, had been made legal under the umbrella of Trusts that were developed from the 1970’s in Auroville, such as Aurelec Trust, Centre of Scientific Research Trust and now the newly

instituted ABC Trust, to name only a few. Small units which had not grown beyond the threshold of a certain amount of turnover were registered under Auroville Fund. The latter had signed on to OO#5 after the original objections to it in 1992. Trusts established before the activation of the Foundation were formally listed as its assets, management and control of which was passed to the unit holders through a formal agreement similar to OO#5.

The citations from the database for this chapter were representative of the communicatively steered basis for action in Auroville. The imperatives of the Foundation did not render submission. Rather, they generated (1) recognition by Aurovilians in the weaknesses of their own decision-making systems; (2) greater participation in decision-making, and; (3) further elaboration of their own systems by virtue of which the general frame of decision-making represented in Figure 5.1 was achieved by 1994. Although not discounting the practice of voting in Resident Assembly meetings entirely, residents of the township did not adopt it as the typical format for decision-making. Further efforts in the 1990's sought to expand participation in decision-making although in the time frame to the year 2000, the methods with which they experimented did not dramatically change the frame adopted by 1994. For example, the Local Area Meetings (LAM) concept adopted for the years 1995-1996 did not continue because participation in them lagged. Auroville was divided into local areas. This was a system in which residents of communities in proximity to each other would discuss issues at evening meetings as a means to spread decision-making to those who typically did not attend meetings. Records from those meetings would be brought forward to groups formed to discuss issues and prepare content and format for Resident Assembly meetings.

This subsection emphasized elements of one process in the post activation of the Auroville Foundation phase which exemplifies how Aurovilians activated and elaborated their own communicatively steered decision-making systems in response to the penetration of a system steered by the medium of power.

### **6.3 Conclusions**

Habermas theorizes system uncoupling from lifeworld, the formation of the two subsystems of economy and state, a process in which communicatively steered activities become increasingly steered by the media of money and power. He was not consistent in the way he characterized the autonomy of the subsystems in regards to lifeworld (Chapter Three) making the issue of the degree to which system functions independently of lifeworld controversial. Chapter Six examined the “seam” between lifeworld and system in the International Township of Auroville. Government officials acted with the authority to expand systemization in Auroville according to a model. The latter involved a formal legal status for Auroville and the intention to integrate Auroville proto systems of decision-making with formal hierarchical control to ensure sound management. To a proportion of the Auroville public, external ownership and hierarchical control of Auroville did not correspond to their vision and experience of Auroville. Hence in their minds it could not be honoured. In each circumstance, the issue was brought to the residents in public meetings during which concerned individuals made it clear that it is the residents who decide the actions to be taken. The case of OO#5 identifies that those who dissented to the Foundation order were facilitated by the community rather than marginalized. They found their forum in the general assemblies which supported them.

Contrary to their own opinion of the significance of OO#5, members of the Working Committee and the FAMC worked to find solutions. (Theme VI: System-building responsive to people's aspirations while not imposing a structure beyond the reach of anyone).

Auroville institutions could have been a vehicle for the expression of the power of the newly formed Foundation. Instead, the institutions were activated to mediate the influence of that potential power to reach compromises through discourse over years between participants of those institutions seeking the mandate of the public and Foundation officials seeking agreement. (Arato and Cohen Points 1 to 3)

In Chapter Five I identified seven principles of organization discovered by applying progressive stages of coding thereby constituting a methodical approach to the data. For Habermas, a methodical approach involves establishing as first order of analysis a direct link between the data and ideas about the data. The seven themes are again recognizable in the preceding section of Chapter Six. The principle of reaching mutual understanding, which underscores each of the seven themes, is what the residents of the township activated to respond to the challenges of the Foundation. In the case of OO#5, one of many challenges, compromises were found through the repeated attempts by both the residents and the Foundation officials.

Through non-compliance and repeated search for the workable means to transfer management from the Foundation to the Auroville public, Auroville's network system of decision-making intensified and elaborated, expanding rather than reducing the communicative participation in the direction of the township. At the seam between lifeworld and system in Auroville, communicative action continued to influence the

steering of systems. Hence the opposition to 00#5 was not a display of naïve innocence with respect to the realities of the new status quo and the price of legal status for Auroville, it was asserting that mutual understanding is the basis for decision-making in Auroville whether the government is involved or not. Discourse ethics conceived by Habermas is the core value of Auroville political organization. In very general terms, authority frequently masquerades as rationality. The activation of the Auroville network of decision-making was not oriented to imposing one view or another on the public, rather it was a search for a common direction which the decision-making process itself legitimated. Principles remained emergent in discourse rather than abstract. (Theme VII: Principles not used for strategic gain; the emergence of principles remains dialogical, communicative, circumspect.)

With regards to the controversy over the degree to which system uncouples from lifeworld, the Auroville context is one in which lifeworld continues to play a role in directing systemization. Hence its development is relevant to Arato and Cohen. Aurovilians worked to achieve a network of decision-making sufficiently “defended, differentiated and organized” to establish “representative institutions within and between” systems (1988, 215). The Auroville network of decision-making could and did monitor and influence “the outcomes of steering processes” (1988, 215). Consistent with Theme II (No private property: the control of assets remains communicative, illocutionary), the Auroville case corresponds to the vision articulated by Arato and Cohen towards “a partially new set of rights with communication rather than property rights as their core” (1988, 215).

Chapter Five demonstrated that residents of Auroville have adopted the communicative rationality which forms the basis of Habermas' social analysis. Chapter Six demonstrated how challenges to communicative rationality in Auroville provoke intensified lifeworld rationalization capable of monitoring and influencing the outcomes of systemization. Their approach was successful in mediating the demands of lifeworld colonization. In the Auroville context, adoption of Habermas' universal of communicative rationality is sustainable in practice. Secondly, to the extent that Habermas' proposition is universally valid, the effort to reach mutual understanding as the building block of organization in Auroville could be one factor which accounts for the longevity and consistent growth of the experimental township.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **CONCLUDING SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

The analysis of decision-making in Auroville which constitutes this dissertation commenced with the concern to derive an analysis which first and foremost closely represents the content of the database. The latter represents the limits of the analysis. The second and equally important concern was to achieve a theoretical analysis expressing a clear and valid connection between the data and the theory. The methodical approach undertaken involved as a first step the separation of database content into free codes of varying types. The types developed through the method of free coding varied along three poles: Subjective First Person versus Objective Third Person reporting, Descriptive versus Inferential codes, a dimension which corresponds to my role as the person ascribing codes, and General versus Specific. Moving through the months and years of the database, I began to integrate axial coding into the free coding. Axial coding in this case involved identifying database content at a higher level of abstraction. Free coding and axial coding continued until the naming of broader axial codes proved exhaustive with respect to the database content. From this point in the database onwards only the axial codes were applied. The collapsing of over 800 codes into 31 allowed for the recognition of relationships between the codes. In the axial coding phase, I recognized seven themes each of which contributes to the course of Auroville development.

Principles of organization explicitly stated as such in the database fall under the axial code: “Operating Principles” and/or are noted in my research notes / files. The seven themes are unstated principles of organization. Secondly, each theme is premised

on illocutionary action, the effort to reach mutual understanding. In other words, the principles of organization inferred from the concrete behaviour of Aurovilians as recorded in the database each represent the effort to reach mutual understanding. Therefore the application of the first order of concern of a reconstructive scientific approach to the analysis, that is, to achieve an internal relationship between the data and ideas about the data, culminated in recognition of operations which correspond to the outcome of Habermas' application of a methodical approach which culminated in his formal pragmatics. The distinction is that the seven themes are operations pertaining to social organization whereas Habermas first set before him the task of understanding what makes mutual understanding possible between individuals. Because the themes are principles of organization that are (1) implicit "operations", and; (2) based on illocutionary action, I argued in the dissertation that political organization in Auroville represents a valid field of observation for the consequences of adoption of communicative action and discourse ethics. The dissertation applies dimensions of both the methodological and theoretical approaches of Jurgen Habermas. The result is an analysis of Auroville which provides practical outcomes of illocutionary action adopted as a principle of organization. This chapter identifies strengths, limitations and contributions of the dissertation, beginning with a brief chapter overview.

## **7.1 Chapter Overview**

In Chapter One, I identify solidarity as the concern common to both the case and the theory adopted to analyze it. It is a brief introduction to Auroville and the methodological approach and theoretical concerns of Jurgen Habermas. I describe how



these three elements combine in my dissertation to constitute an analysis of Auroville that also contributes to theory construction. Chapter Two provides the historical antecedents to the period represented in the database. I outline the life and practices of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who inspired the launch of Auroville. Description of the period of early development in Auroville between 1968 and 1975 provides the immediate lead up to the publication of the first Auroville Notes with which database analysis commenced.

Demographics of both the early phase of development and the year 2000 provide a view of the growth of the township in the years which comprise the scope of the database.

Chapter Three situates the dissertation analysis in the context of the rise of, and problems associated with, modernity. The theory of communicative action, a modernist approach by Jurgen Habermas, is discussed in the context of a selection of his contemporary post modernist authors. His theory is further specified by Arato and Cohen who, in the modernist tradition, elaborate his lifeworld – system duality with a view to specific forms of social change useful to the dissertation analysis. I discuss a range of authors from different epistemological orientations who in turn identify the potential for intentional communities in general to address the problem of modernity, practical problems associated with the application of consensus, and theoretical insights into understanding Auroville as intentional community.

Chapter Four identifies the dissertation as one component of a programme of research on Auroville I have undertaken, the epistemological orientation of Habermas, and the procedures developed to set up the database analysis. Chapter Five follows the pre theoretical analysis of the database from free coding to axial coding to the generation of the seven themes which identify implicit agreements on principles of organization of

the township. Because illocutionary action is the common base of the seven themes, there is justification for a theoretical treatment of the database by the theory of communicative action which would serve to critique its own features. In Chapter Six, I review the connection between the propositions upon which the theory of communicative action was developed and the seven themes that emerged in the database analysis. I then apply Arato and Cohen's summarization of Habermas' lifeworld – system duality to one sequence of events in Auroville which formed part of the Aurovilian response to government efforts to integrate Auroville decision-making into a system of ownership and hierarchical authority.

## **7.2 Strengths and Limitations**

The methodology developed to undertake an analysis of Auroville addresses the concern for the hermeneutical circle but does not eliminate it. Analysis undertaken according to nomological method prescribes the application of theory to data. Data is subsumed by predetermined categories and relationships. Alternatively, I chose to approximate Habermas' reconstructive approach by first developing a pre theoretical analysis by examining the database to generate the relationships discernable in the database itself. By taking up this approach, the dissertation analysis was formulated based on what was learned from the database. Having recognized the congruence between the theory of communicative action and Auroville even during the data upload phase in India, I could present a proposal declaring my general intention to apply the theory to the database but the specifics of the analysis were developed along with the database analysis, that is, the three steps of free – axial – selective coding. One could not predict

the themes that emerged through careful coding of the data or the way in which they would correspond to Habermas' theory. A time factor could have intervened limiting the pre theoretical analysis to the observations and relationships recognized through the axial coding represented in Table 5.1. Following the identification of themes expressed through the database, the direction of the analysis was driven by the recognition that they: (1) represented implicit agreements on principles of organization of the township, and (2) represented illocutionary action, the effort to reach mutual understanding. Therefore one could observe in the database the consequences for the experimental township of adopting discourse ethics as a principle of organization. The contribution to, and the application of, the theory of communicative action had been found in the database.

The attention applied to the database then is a strength of the dissertation. Compared to nomological research, the reconstructive approach I adopted reduced the risk of interpretation of events in a way insensitive to the experience of the participants. Relationships observed in the database analysis are drawn directly from the participants' record of their development rather than relationships observed from the application of a theoretical framework to their record. The database analysis in my approach not only intervened one analytic stage between the data and the theoretical treatment, it also determined the application of the theoretical framework.

The reconstructive approach I adopted addresses but does not eliminate concern for the hermeneutical circle. Qualitative research is *ex post facto*. In this case, it is analysis of a record which by its very nature is "after the fact". Variables cannot be controlled. The judgement and discipline of the researcher plays a substantial role. A different researcher applying the same methods to the same database may not generate

the same results. Hence while I may claim that my two stage approach to the database enhances the validity of the dissertation research, it reduces the reliability. With regards to the hermeneutical circle: Drawing from the Weberian epistemology discussed in Chapter Four, one must assume that my own values are written into the dissertation. My participation in the culture of Auroville may at the same time allow me greater sensitivity with regards to the interpretation of events and greater bias as well.

The database itself is the limit to this analysis of development in Auroville. Participant observation, interviews, surveys, archival work and focus groups are all methods that could generate separately or together different results regarding similar topics of concern to the ones taken up in this dissertation. The strength of the database of Auroville Notes / News / Reviews as the resource for research on Auroville is its frequent detail and expanse of reported material on a weekly basis over 25 years. It is also fragmented; reporting is inconsistent. Meetings, events, reports and surveys can be mentioned but not found in the database. Different community and editorial practices over time means the database cannot be trusted to provide all one would expect if its optimum level of reporting was consistent. Despite its shortcomings, the database will be a useful reference and resource for future research in and on Auroville.

### **7.3 Contributions**

The four principle attributes of reconstructive science are: (1) it is pre theoretical; (2) it involves concrete operations; (3) the operations are implicit; if made explicit they would be recognized; (4) the operations are universal. The methodological approach developed to undertake the database analysis fulfills criteria (1) to (3). I do not claim that

the seven implicit agreements on principles of organization in Auroville are universal. Because illocutionary action, the effort to reach mutual understanding, underscores each of the themes, the dissertation research does support the claim to universality by Habermas of his formal pragmatics. I argue that Auroville constitutes on a civic level an example of social organization premised on communicative rationality. To the extent that Habermas' claim to universality is valid, the explanatory power of his claim is made evident by two features of the Auroville Township: its diversity and its longevity. The comprehension of solidarity for which the theory of communicative action argues presents solidarity and rationality, solidarity and autonomy, as complementarity. Aurovilians need not agree but they do indeed need the opportunity to address each other free of any form of constraint or coercion. This is their achievement. Their institutions act on the concerns of the public. Each participant has the opportunity to bring their concerns to the ultimate decision-making forum, the general assembly (by different names). It is not anarchy according to a conventional view of it but it is free participation in decision-making. It works because their institutions support it, as demonstrated in Chapter Six. According to the theory of communicative action, Aurovilians fulfill the conditions of the principle of Universalization (U), the principle of discourse ethics (D) and the rules of discourse. Therefore, according to Habermas, they fulfill the conditions of achieving solidarity in modernity. Communicative action appears sustainable as an organizing principle for the residents of the International Township of Auroville, Tamil Nadu, India.

Chapter Six demonstrated the intensification rather than truncation of lifeworld rationalization in the face of lifeworld colonization. Progressive rationalization of the lifeworld is one of the principle objectives which underscore the theoretical work of

Arato and Cohen in relation to their applications of the theory of communicative action.

The dissertation analyses identify three ways in which the case study of Auroville contributes to Arato and Cohen's theoretical purposes:

- 1) The township appears to be working towards "a partially new set of rights with communication rather than property rights as their core" (1988, 215);
- 2) Auroville is an example of lifeworld institutions sufficiently "defended, differentiated and organized," to enable them to monitor and influence subsystems steered by (money and) power (1988, 215); and
- 3) It is a practical working example of one variation of a "self-limiting radical democracy" (1988, 209).

With regard to the ambiguity different references in The Theory of Communicative Action generates regarding the autonomy of system from lifeworld, the analysis of Auroville identifies a seam between lifeworld and system through which the communicative rationality of lifeworld continues to influence the steering processes of system.

The case study suggests an idea that is untreated in the dissertation. In a world of increasing cosmopolitanism, Auroville represents local differentiation and autonomy. The significance of this cross current to global development could represent another area of interest to social research.

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## APPENDIX A: CODING METHOD DEVELOPMENT

According to Lewins and Silver:

Qualitative coding is the process by which segments of data are identified as relating to, or being an example of, a more general idea, instance, theme or category. Segments of data from across the whole dataset are placed together in order to be retrieved together at a later stage. Whether coding manually or using software, you will build up a system to organize data and your ideas about it. (2007, 81-82)

The process of coding sets up the data to facilitate the search for “similarities, differences, patterns and relationships” (Lewins and Silver 2007, 82). As the first step to develop a qualitative analysis, the approach to coding need be consistent with one’s goals. Lewins and Silver differentiate between inductive and deductive approaches (2007, 84-88), give several examples of formalized schemes by different scholars, then argue that the very “cyclical and iterative nature of qualitative research,” especially when supported by qualitative software, lends itself to the combining of inductive and deductive approaches (Lewins and Silver 2007, 88-89). Inductive approaches are taken up “to prevent existing theoretical concepts from over-defining the analysis and obscuring the possibility of identifying and developing new concepts and theories” (Lewins and Silver 2007, 84).

an inductive approach begins with the researchers ‘immersing’ themselves in the documents (that is, the various messages) in order to identify the dimensions or *themes* that seem meaningful to the producers of each message. (Abrahamson 1983, 286 in Lewins and Silver 2007, 84)

It would seem that an inductive approach corresponds to reconstructive science. The latter has further specificity: it involves operations that are (1) necessarily present although not necessarily recognized, and; (2) they are independent of the particularity of

the circumstances under study, that is, they are universal. Induction and reconstructive science hold in common the internal connection between the data and ideas about the data. In other words, induction forms part of reconstructive science. I will in this dissertation argue that my approach is reconstructive as well as inductive.

Although I resisted first approaching the data deductively, when I reduced and amalgamated codes to those most prevalent in the database (described below), I also renamed the codes which approximated terms from Habermas' theory of communicative action with those terms and in this way incorporated elements of a deductive approach to the database:

In a deductive approach, researchers use some categorical scheme suggested by a theoretical perspective, and the documents provide the means for assessing the hypothesis. (Berg 2001, 6 in Lewins and Silver 2007, 86)

Lewins and Silver describe the three steps of an inductive approach which proponents of grounded theory undertake (2007, 84-85). Open, axial and selective coding typically involves cyclical examination of the same data. Given the unusual length of my database for an inductive approach, and consistent with the progressive theory development intention of grounded theory, I chose to transition from one phase to the next in the process of coding the database from beginning to end. By so doing, I followed the original field study approach of grounded theory in which theory development progresses with further data collection. In Chapter Five, I elaborate the process and results of developing a grounded analysis of the database.

According to Lewins and Silver, open coding is the highly detailed first phase of coding (2007, 84). Data is fragmented into phrases, sentences or paragraphs in order to open and organize the data according to a range of different types of significance, codes

that may be descriptive or conceptual, precise or general, or codes adopted according to terms found in the database. The content of the database is in this way noted, described or interpreted. The intention of breaking the data into fragments is to open the data to the range of possible ways to understand it and allow for comparison of codes with each other. This process typically generates a high number of codes, in my case it generated over 800 codes. I developed several different types of codes about which I recognize three poles of differentiation along which each code is located: The standpoint of the contribution to the News, that is, Subjective First Person versus Objective Third Person reporting, Descriptive versus Inferential codes, a dimension which corresponds to my role as the person ascribing codes, and General versus Specific. A few examples of First Person contributions include the listing under “Expression of...”:

- Expression of Inability to Contribute in Meetings
- Expression of the purpose and meaning of Auroville
- Expressions of Certitude in AV
- Expressions of Collective Organization
- Expressions of Community without Unity
- Expressions of Ideal Economy

Here the voice of the contributor is distinct, compared to contributions which report meeting content and developments, many of which are listed under “Development of...”

- Development of Study Group on All Matters Related to Land
- Development of Team to do Diplomatic Work in Delhi
- Development of Teams for Contact with Different Levels of Government
- Development of Telephone Service
- Development of the Auroville Cooperative
- Development of the Organization of Fundraising

Secondly, I may ascribe a code in a descriptive manner, such as “Community Assuming Responsibilities” versus drawing inferences from the content so coding text, for example: “Financial Situation Pushes Change”, or “Call for Unity Demands Conformity”. Thirdly,

I applied codes ranging from the very general to the very specific. The dimensions of this reflexive scheme overlap. For example, I may apply a code descriptively and/or inferentially to a contributor's voice. The dimensions are not mutually exclusive: particular voices are certainly included under a code such as "Development of the Auroville Cooperative." All evidence pertaining to development of this civic body is included under this code. It is important to note that one may apply as many codes as one believes appropriate to a single chunk of data drawing as many significances as possible into a range of separate files. Hence the fragmenting of data into segments involved in open coding does in practice result in very scrupulous consideration of the significance of the data segments in relation to each other.

I applied the open coding method exclusively to the period of the database Auroville Notes December 1975 to Auroville News November 1983. As mentioned above, a chunk of data may have more than one code (or node as it is called in the qualitative software, NVivo) applied to it. In order to exemplify, the text below is extracted from Auroville Notes 1979 file 7911 (November 1979) Issue #131 and may also be viewed with coding stripes applied in figure 4.1. In that frame, the codes that appear without coding stripes form part of the range of codes applied to text in other parts of this file, arranged according to alphabetical order.

#### **# 131 – Nov 79 – p.17**

##### **Artisana Trust:**

Prem reported a meeting held on 06.11.79, in which he had given the example of Encens d'Auroville as a good one to be followed, as they have set up a system by which 30% of all sales is immediately kept apart, one third of which (10% of the total sales) goes directly to the Envelopes.

This process was broadly agreed by the other units, and remains to be worked out in the details.

Prem also mentioned the fact that the order received by Lisa for bags to silk-screen for Germany would bring some money, and that it would go either to the Envelopes or to a “free-store envelope” in order to help meet the basic needs of the Aurovilians (this has to be discussed further).

Annotation 3: This appears to be the beginning of a practice which persists to the present. It became in later years a model for contributions from external sources.

Extract 4.1. Artisana Trust meeting November 1979 Issue # 131.

Aurville 1973 - 2008.nvp - NVivo

File Edit View Go Project Links Code Format Tools Window Help

Normal Times New Roman 12

Code AL Name

Look for: Search in: 7911 Find Next Clear

Options

7911

| Name    | Nodes | References | Created            | Modified          |
|---------|-------|------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| ANM 131 | 42    | 59         | 10/23/2006 3:04 PM | 6/25/2008 12:28 P |
| ANM 132 | 95    | 170        | 10/23/2006 3:04 PM | 8/6/2008 6:27 PM  |

ANM 131

# 131 - Nov 79 - p.17

Artisans Trust TO GUY

Prem reported a meeting held on 06.11.79, in which he had given the example of Enzens of Aurville as a good one to be followed, as they have set up a system by which 30% of all sales is immediately kept apart, one third of which (10% of the total sales) goes directly to the Developer.

This process was broadly agreed by the other units, and remains to be worked out in the details.

Prem also mentioned the fact that the order received by Lisa for bags to silk-screen for Germany would bring some money, and that it would go either to the Developers or to a "free-store envelope" in order to help meet the basic needs of the Aurvillians (this has to be discussed further).

# 131 - Nov 79 - pp.18-19

Periods

Item Content

3 This appears to be the beginning of a practice which persists to the present. It became in later years a model for contributions from external sources.

3 Items Nodes: 42 References: 59 Read Only Line 507 Column: 8

Coding Density

Elaboration of Settlements

Development of the Bakery

Development of the Organization of Fundraising

Development of Value Policy

Elaboration of Schools

Development of Town Planning

Development of Alternative Energy from 7907

Development of Agriculture

Court Cases from 7903

Contribution of Ad hoc Groups

Community Financial Deficit

Community Participation in Collective Economy

Commercial Unit Development

Commercial Unit Contributions to AV Units

Collective Economy

Envelope System

Figure 4.1. NVivo Screen 7911 (November 1979) Issue #131 page17.



The highlighting marks annotated text. Three nodes were applied to this brief AV Notes article reporting on the meeting of Artisana Trust, Aurovilians involved in productive units: “Collective Economy”, “Commercial Unit Participation in Collective Economy”, and “Envelope System”. Under the general node “Collective Economy”, all text from this time frame pertaining to any dimension of the AV collective economy is located and may be searched. Searches take place within a file and not between files in this program. The nodes which follow are related and are more specific, that is, “Commercial Unit Participation in Collective Economy” and “Envelope System”. The Envelope System was established in November 1978 to collect and disburse funds to meet the individual and collective needs of residents of the township.

Besides brief annotations that may be added to the text, memos are the means to add and keep track of ideas that emerge related to the nodes applied. Hence I keep all of my ideas pertaining to the text accumulated under the node “Envelope System” in a memo of the same name. To serve as an example of how developing nodes and keeping track of ideas about them is the first order of analysis in my qualitative approach, the following observation was added to the memo “Envelope System” for a file under October 1979:

7910 #130 The envelope system: Because it allows the public to fill up the categories of needs, followed by the envelope meeting which disburses only the unspecified amount to categories showing need, it reflects the value in Auroville for individual choice / determination, i.e. that the economy should flow based on wide open participation.

This memo was the benchmark for the eventual recognition that each of the experiments in collective economy in Auroville had in common this determination on the part of the

Auroville polity to maintain individual choice in the sector crucial to the survival of the township, the collective economy.

Facilitating notation of the development of the research process is a second utility served by memos. I draw the following text from the memo “Coding Method Development”, a memo I maintained from the beginning of the coding process:

**22.5.08** (working on 7709)

Text annotation 1: this text indicates dysfunctions in decision-making, Auroville's practice of consensus. It also indicates power. Power appears to be held through those organizing Pour Tous.

Should I incorporate power and consensus-building as two opposed tree nodes?  
Created as tree nodes on this day.

Therefore I have a record of why and how I developed the method of coding that I have.

The construction of tree nodes (to be viewed in Chapter Five) following this notation was an early attempt at axial coding, the second phase of coding outlined by Lewins and Silver. As we shall see, it led to further development of the database analysis. According to Lewins and Silver, axial coding involves examining the similarities and differences between codes and the data segments they represent in order to bring what had been fragmented back together again on a more abstract level (2007, 84-85). This phase involves identification and exploration of the relationships between codes. “Similar codes may be grouped together, merged into higher-level categories, or subdivided into more detailed ones” (2007, 84-85).

In the phase of coding the database from its content November 1983 to May 1987, I continued open coding while at the same time developing a more abstract coding frame (axial coding). This change in method was based on two general observations: (1) although having formulated over 800 codes, only a few dozen were consistently applied,

indicating what can be learned from the database, and; (2) system formation was a viable code representing many of the frequently applied codes. Consensus building and system formation were the basis of the new coding scheme which commenced with the recognition of five then six general themes. From the memo "Coding Method Development":

**27.02.09**

8310 #23

...The code "Formalizing of Funding and Budget Arrangements" is an example of rationalizing activity into a more efficient "system".

"System formation" could become a code.

...

Potential new coding frame:

System development  
Consensus formation  
Challenges to consensus formation  
Consequences of consensus formation  
Maintaining significance of individual participation

**4.3.09**

Second try:

**System formation** (such as Formalizing of Funding and Budget Arrangements") Does this draw from consensus formation?

**Consensus formation** (such as establishing the PT Meeting as the principle decision-making body) Does this hamper system formation?

**Challenges to consensus formation** (such as direction by administrator, i.e. government authority) What reduces participation in decision-making or blocks the capacity of collective decision-making. How do they meet these challenges?

**Consequences of consensus formation** (such as organizational issues remaining unresolved). Lack of system?

**Maintaining effectiveness of individual participation** (such as ability to target funding from a commercial unit.) Dysfunction: Tyranny of the individual personality.

**Expressions of Power** (such as ability to affect organization of unit to which one targets funding) Power contradicting effectiveness of individual participation. Power reducing collective decision-making, i.e. the ability of the community to direct its own development.

The codes of the new coding frame not only replaced previous codes because of their more abstract nature but were also more conducive to recognizing the relationships between codes, identified in a preliminary way above in the “second try.” I added to the five original axial codes of the new coding frame to create a more balanced frame between consensus formation and system formation to arrive at a scheme of 11 and then continued coding until I recognized that the scheme was exhaustive. The resulting coding frame of 31 codes replaced the previous range of over 800 codes. As some of the new codes were adopted in this process, they were dated. For example, the new code “Push factors for Political Subsystem Formation from 8705” marks the file folder for May 1987 as the starting point for the application of this code. One must refer to the previous coding system for codes related to this theme previous to this date.

May 1987 is the point in the database where I began to apply only the 29 (which expanded to 31) codes of the new coding frame. For the differentiation of system, I adopted Habermas’ distinction between political and economic subsystems, and his term “public sphere” to denote the sphere when reported in Auroville of private citizens informally meeting to discuss issues of relevance to the township as a whole. Such adoption of terms from Habermas involves integration of elements of a deductive approach. I applied the axial coding frame exclusively to the database for its contents from May 1987 through September 1993. Because the application of this system produced the greatest frequency of the several different “system formation” codes, the outcome justified a change in thinking with respect to “power” to “the systemization of

power”. I will show a screenshot of the axial coding frame from July 1994 in Chapter Five to demonstrate conclusions drawn from the application of the axial coding frame.

My treatment of the period in the database from September 1993 through to July 1994 corresponds to the third and final phase of coding in a grounded theory approach. Selective coding involves a search for the material which exemplifies the themes discovered:

Instances in the data which most pertinently illustrate themes, concepts, relationships, etc. are identified. Conclusions are validated by illustrating instances represented by and grounded in the data. Identified patterns are tested and core categories in the developing theory illustrated. This process will lead to segments of data being chosen to quote and discuss in the final written product of the research project. (Lewins and Silver 2007, 85)

Axial coding from the database contents of August 1991 to September 1993 led to what is my third level of database analysis, from (1) open coding to (2) the results of axial coding to (3) the recognition of broader insights into the unspoken mechanisms of Auroville development. These analytical themes, to be discussed in Chapter Five, emerged from the coding of the database from February through September 1993. I maintained axial coding along with the selective coding from September 1993 to July 1994. The latter phase verified that the themes which represented general trends over time could also be recognized in short data chunks. I then employed the NVivo tool “Text Search Query” to assemble further information for the study to include the period from July 1994 to December 2000.

## APPENDIX B: AXIAL CODES

A single document (issue of the Auroville Notes or News) is a source from which different references may be drawn.

Table 5.1. Nodes 31 Screenshot at 9407 (July 1994) Issue #544

| Name   | Sources | References |
|--|---------|------------|
| Operating Principles                                     | 81      | 194        |
| Assessments  | 55      | 71         |
| Critical Issues Identified                               | 94      | 189        |
| Economic Subsystem Formation from 8706                   | 200     | 535        |
| Political Subsystem Formation From 8705                  | 214     | 801        |
| Public Sphere from 8910                                  | 10      | 14         |
| Push Factors for Political Subsystem Formation from 8705 | 37      | 53         |
| System Formation   | 174     | 288        |
| Consensus Formation                                      | 145     | 236        |
| Consensus Formation Work Group or Community from 8709    | 18      | 23         |
| Economic Subsystem Breakdown from 8709                   | 40      | 46         |
| Foundation   | 79      | 262        |
| Lifeworld Colonization from 9212                         | 40      | 98         |
| Political Subsystem Breakdown From 8705                  | 24      | 32         |
| Push Factors for Economic Subsystem Formation from 8709  | 33      | 44         |
| Challenges to Consensus Formation                        | 33      | 48         |
| Group Formation from 9210                                | 50      | 110        |
| Consequences of Consensus Formation Process              | 6       | 6          |
| Maintaining Effectiveness of Individual Participation    | 15      | 17         |
| Expressions of Power                                     | 5       | 5          |
| Push Factors for System Formation                        | 14      | 18         |
| System Restructuring                                     | 24      | 33         |
| System Breakdown   | 32      | 34         |
| Problem Resolution Approach                              | 101     | 142        |
| Unilateral Decision-making                               | 8       | 9          |
| Unilateral Group Decision-making                         | 20      | 23         |
| Consensus Formation in Groups from 8603                  | 3       | 4          |
| System from 8603   | 35      | 38         |
| Government Involvement from 8603                         | 87      | 131        |
| Development from 8603                                    | 65      | 105        |
| Transitions from 8709                                    | 10      | 13         |

In summary, the nodes of this scheme signify:

**Operating Principles:** Statements which identify explicit principles guiding Auroville development.

**Assessments:** Personal statements on events or trends in Auroville.

**Critical Issues Identified:** Issues expressed or identifiable as critical to the development of Auroville.

**Economic Subsystem Formation from 8706:** Instances of economic subsystem formation from June 1987.

**Political Subsystem Formation from 8705:** Instances of political subsystem formation from May 1987.

**Public Sphere from 8910:** Evidence from October 1989 of discussion groups formed to discuss Auroville issues parallel to the formal bodies available to the public.

**Push Factors for Political Subsystem Formation from 8705:** Evidence of factors which push for political subsystem formation from May 1987.

**System Formation:** Instances of system formation which post May 1987 (8705) are exclusive of economic and political subsystem formation. For example, developments pertaining to the formation of the Auroville Centres abroad (international network), and developments pertaining to the network supporting education and development in the local villages, called the Village Action Group.

**Consensus Formation:** Evidence of consensus chosen as the means to reach agreement.

**Consensus Formation Work Group or Community from 8709:** Instances post September 1987 when consensus is chosen or identifiable as the means to reach a decision in the context of a work group or community.

**Economic Subsystem Breakdown from 8709:** Evidence post September 1987 that economic systems in place are not meeting the needs which they were designed to address.

**Foundation:** Evidence of involvement of the Auroville Foundation in the development of Auroville.

**Lifeworld Colonization from 9212:** Evidence from December 1992 of interference or influence on decision-making in Auroville from systems external to the township.

**Political Subsystem Breakdown from 8705:** Evidence post May 1987 that decision-making systems in place are not serving or supporting the interests of residents to steer developments or address issues arising in the township.

**Push Factors for Economic Subsystem Formation from 8709:** Evidence of factors from September 1987 which push for economic subsystem formation.

**Push Factors for System Formation:** Evidence of factors which push for system formation which is exclusive of political subsystem formation from May 1987 and economic subsystem formation from September 1987.

**Challenges to Consensus Formation:** Evidence of factors that impede consensus formation.

**Group Formation from 9210:** Auroville organization is composed of a network of groups either self-forming or resolved in meetings to be constituted to address specific issues like housing or the organization of guest houses. Most groups were coded individually in the free coding stage and later coded under “Political Subsystem Formation” with a separate notation on paper for easier reference. From October 1992 they were also coded under “Group Formation from 9210”.



**Consequences of Consensus Formation Process:** Evidence of negative consequences of relying upon consensus decision-making.

**Maintaining Effectiveness of Individual Participation:** Evidence of emphasis on ensuring the effectiveness of individual participation in collective organization.

**Expressions of Power:** Evidence of breaches in rational will formation, by which I mean an initiative to steer individuals, groups or situations without concern to engage the free will of all involved.

**System Restructuring:** Evidence of adjustments made to existing systems.

**System Breakdown:** Evidence that systems are breaking down. This includes all systems between 1983 and 1987, after which it is system breakdown excluding economic and political subsystem breakdown.

**Problem Resolution Approach:** Methods applied in Auroville to resolving disputes.

**Unilateral Decision-making:** Evidence of actions or decisions taken without consultation with other concerned people or groups.

**Unilateral Group Decision-making:** Evidence of groups taking actions, decisions or setting policy without consultation with other concerned people or groups.

**Consensus Formation in Groups from 8603:** Evidence of consensus as the method of decision-making within groups.

**System from 8603:** Extracts of the operation of systems including economic and political subsystems, Auroville International, Project Coordination Group and Village Action Group.

**Government Involvement from 8603:** Evidence of the relationships between Auroville and different levels of government in India, not including officials associated with the Auroville Foundation.

**Development from 8603:** Physical developments in Auroville such as the locating of public buildings, schools, new communities, and the placement of roads.

**Transitions from 8709:** Evidence of substantial changes to existing systems or groups, and the emergence of new groups. Most transitions have been noted on paper for easier reference.